THE QUR'ÂN AND THE ORIENTALISTS

BY
MUḤAMMAD MOHAR ALI

JAM'IYAT IḤYAA' MINHAAJ AL-SUNNAH

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AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR MAIN THEORIES AND ASSUMPTIONS

By
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا و نبينا محمد و آله أجمعين و بعد

PREFACE

The subject of the orientalists' views and assumptions about the Qur'ân especially attracted my attention during the early 1990s when I had been engaged in writing the *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists.*[1] It soon became clear that the major part of their assumptions and remarks about the Prophet are aimed directly or indirectly against the Qur'ân, which fact goes only to confirm the Qur'ânic statement at 6:33 (*al-'An'âm*):

فانهم لا يكذبونك و لكن الظالمين بآيات الله يجحدون

"So in fact they cry lies not to you [i. e., the Prophet]; but the transgressors do at Allah's *'âyahs* (revelations) hurl rejection."

Subsequently, early in 1999, my attention was drawn to an article written by Toby Lester under caption "What is the Koran" and published in the January 1999 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly.* It was a sort of heavyweight journalistic writing publicising the views of Gerd-R Puin regarding the Qur'ân based on his examination of some Qur'ânic manuscripts lately discovered at San'â', together with the views of some other orientalists. I wrote a review of that article which was published as a booklet under caption: *The Qur'ân and the Latest Orientalist Assumptions.*[2] In the following year I presented a paper (in Arabic) on the orientalists' assumptions about the Qur'ân at a seminar on Qur'ânic studies and sciences, organised by the King Fahd Qur'ân Printing Complex and held at Madina between 30 September and 3 October 2000.[3] A revised English version of this paper was published in 2002 as another booklet under caption :*The Qur'ân and the Orientalists: A Brief Survey of Their Assumptions.*[4] In the preface to this latter booklet I mentioned that the subject needed a more detailed treatment. The present work is an attempt in this direction.

As I started organizing the work I realized that some of the chapters in the *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists* on the themes of the Prophet's alleged preparation for giving out the Qur'ân, his alleged borrowing from Judaism and Christianity

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[1] M. M. Ali, *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists, with special reference to the writings of William Muir, D.S. Margoliouth and W. Montgomery Watt*, vols. 1A and 1B, King Fahd Qur'ân Printing Complex, Madina, 1997.

[2] Published by *Jam'iat Ihyaa' Minhaaj al-Sunnah*, Ipswich, June, 1999.

[3] Published by the King Fahd Qur'ân Printing Complex, Madina, under caption : مزاعم المستشرقين حول القرآن الكريم

[4] Published by *Jam'iat Ihyaa' Minhaaj al-Sunnah*, Ipswich, June, 2002.

for composing the Qur'ân and the assumptions about the Qur'ânic *waḥy* are very much related to the subject of the present work and that without these discussions the treatment of it would remain palpably incomplete. The first seven chapters of the present work are thus revised versions of the relevant chapters in the *Sîrat al-Nabî etc.* The rest of the chapters dealing with the orientalists' assumptions about the history and texts of the Qur'ân are newly written, incorporating some materials from my above mentioned booklets.

As thus designed, the present work gives in a compact and integrated form the main orientalist assumptions and theories about the Qur'ân and examines them critically. The treatment is not what some of the orientalists are prone to call "apologetic". I have met them on their own grounds and have taken up their arguments and statements one by one, pointing out their faults, inconsistencies and untenability. I do not claim, however, to be exhaustive and comprehensive. If the present work helps to make the readers aware of the main orientalist assumptions and theories about the Qur'ân and their inherent faults and unreasonableness, my efforts will not have gone wholly in vain.

I am grateful to my wife, Rosy, and my son Mansoor, whose care and attention have sustianed me through a prolonged illeness and enabled me to pursue and complete the present work. My thanks are due also to my daughter-in-law, Muneera, and my second son, Maaruf, who have gone through the computer print-out script of the book and drawn my attention to a number of typographical and other errors. I am responsible, however, for any other errors that might still have escaped scrutiny. Last but not least, special thanks are due to my eldest son, Manu (Abu Muntaṣir) and the Jam'iyat Iḥyaa' Minhaaj al-Sunnah, for having arranged for prompt publication of the work.

May Allah enable us to do what He likes and is pleasing to Him; and peace and blessings of Allah be on His final Prophet and Messenger, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allah.

And all the praise is for Allah, Lord of all beings.

M. M. Ali
11 April 2004

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

B.S.O.A.S.	= *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London.
Bukhârî	= 'Abû 'Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî, *Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî* (The number refers to the no. of *ḥadîth* in *Fath al-Bârî*)
Ibn Hishâm	= 'Abû Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mâlik ibn Hishâm, *Al-Sîrat al-Nabawiyyah*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salâm Tadmurî, 4 vols., Beirut, 1990.
J.A.S.B.	= *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
J.A.O.S.	= *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
J.R.A.S.	= *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*
M. at M.	= W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford University Press, 1960
M.W.	= *The Moslem World*, Hartford Seminary Foundation, Connecticut, U.S.A.
Muslim	= 'Abû al-Ḥasan Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjâj, al-Quashayrî, al-Naysâbûrî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim* (The number refers to the number of *ḥadîth* in the edition by Fu'âd 'Abd al-Bâqî, 5 vols., Istanbul, n.d.).
Musnad	= 'Abû 'Abd Allah Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal ibn Muḥammad, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal wa beihâmishihi Muntakhab Kanj al-'Ummâl*, 6 vols., old print, n.d.
Siyar	= Shams al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn 'Ahmad ibn 'Uthmân al-Dhahabî, *Siyar 'A'lâm al-Nubalâ'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ût and Ḥusayn al-Asad, 25 vols., Beirut, 1992.
Ṭayâlisî	= Sulaymân ibn Dâud ibn al-Jârûd 'Abî Dâud, *Musnad 'Abî Dâud al-Ṭayâlisî*, 2 vols., Beirut, n.d.

THE QUR'ÂN AND THE ORIENTALISTS: AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR MAIN THEORIES AND ASSUMPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

It has been a constant endeavour of the orientalists to assail the Qur'ân. This has been so since the rise of orientalism itself. Their main aim has been to prove that the Qur'ân is a product of human mind and hand. Basically this attitude on the part of non-Muslims is as old as the Qur'ân itself. The Makkan unbelievers, the immediate audience of the Qur'ânic revelations, made exactly the same allegation, saying that these were only a man's utterances,[1] that their trustworthy but unlettered young man Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) had turned a poet or a sorcerer[2] or someone else had composed the passages of the Qur'ân which he memorized in the morning and the evening and gave out as Allah's revelations or that these were mere ancient fables.[3] The Qur'ân categorically denies these allegations and gives appropriate replies to this particular objection. In general the Qur'ân's response to this allegation takes at least seven principal forms. (a) Allah declares that the Qur'ân is not the composition of a human being nor did the Prophet turn a poet.[4] (b) The Qur'ân repeatedly says that it is Allah Who sent down the Qur'ân and that also in the Arabic language.[5] (c) Allah repeatedly asked the Prophet not to move his tongue hastily in order to memorize what was being delivered to him and to listen patiently and carefully till the completion of the communication, assuring him that He would enable him to remember what was being delivered to him.[6] This group of the Qur'ânic passages clearly prove that what was being delivered to the Prophet was in the form of particular texts. (d) Allah consoles the Prophet and asks him to bear with patience the objection and rejection of the unbelievers by reminding him that in the past there had not been a single Prophet who had not been similarly disbelieved and objected to.[7] In fact the accounts of the previous Prophets given in the Qur'ân are geared to this end and to bring home to the

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[1] Qur'ân, 74:25.
[2] Qur'ân, 10:76, 21:5, 21:36, 37:4, 47:7; 51:52-53,74:24. 52:30.
[3] Qur'ân, 25:5.
[4] Qur'ân, 36:69; 69:40-41.
[5] Qur'ân, 4:166; 6:96; 12:2; 14:1; 20:113; 22:16; 21:50; 24:1; 25:6; 38:29; 44:3; 97:1, among others.
[6] Qur'ân, 20:114; 75:16.
[7] Qur'ân, 3:183-84; 6:34; 13:23; 21:41; 36:30, among others.

unbelievers the truth of the message. (e) Allah asks the Prophet to declare that if he fabricated anything himself and then gave it out in the name of Allah he would be severely punished.[1] (f) Allah asks the Prophet to tell the people that He is the Witness between him and them and that there could be no better a witness of this matter than Allah.[2] This is very significant; for Allah's communication with His Messengers is essentially an intimate affair which no outsider can witness or vouchsafe for. (g) Allah asks the Prophet to throw out a challenge to listeners of all times to come up with a text similar to that of even a single *sûrah* of the Qur'ân if they had any doubt about its being the words of God.[3] The challenge remains open till today.

Ever since the time of the Prophet unbelievers and critics have merely rehearsed the Makkan unbelievers' view about the Qur'ân. And since the middle of the nineteenth century modern European scholars, the orientalists, have repeated the same objections and arguments. Foremost of these nineteenth and early twentieth century orientalists are A Sprenger, William Muir, Theodor Nöldeke, Ignaz Goldziher, W. Wellhausen, Leone Caetani and David S. Margoliouth. Their work and conclusions have been further developed and summarised in the middle and later part of the twentieth century principally by Richard Bell and his pupil W. Montgomery Watt. All these scholars have attempted to show, by one device or another, that the Qur'ân is Muḥammad's (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) own composition.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, a new trend has appeared among certain orientalists who have come forward with the suggestion that not only is the Qur'ân a work by human hand but that it came into being through a process of evolution and growth over the first two centuries of Islam. These group of orientalists are generally known as the "revisionists". Foremost among the proponents of these views are J. Wansborough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook and Yahuda De Nevo. Their views are summarised and publicised by others like Andrew Rippin, Ibn Warraq, Toby Lester, and others.

Those who suggest that the Qur'ân is the Prophet's composition have recourse to the following lines of arguments:

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[1] Qur'ân, 69:44-46.
[2] Qur'ân, 6:19; 4:76; 4:166; 13:43; 17:96; 29:52, among others.
[3] Qur'ân, 2:23; 10:38; 11:13.

(a) That the Prophet was an ambitious person who made preparations for giving out the Qur'ân and for the role he played.[1] Especially he cultivated poetical skill since his early life to be able to compose the Qur'ân.[2]

(b) That he was not quite an unlettered person and the term *'ummîy* applied to him has a different connotation;[3]

(c) That he borrowed ideas and information from Judaism and Christianity which he incorporated in the Qur'ân;[4]

(d) That contemporary scientific errors are reflected in the Qur'ân; so are many commercial terms and foreign words, both showing his authorship of it.[5]

(e) That the term *waḥy* by means of which he gave out the Qur'ân does not mean verbal communication of any text but "suggestions" and "intellectual locution".[6]

As regards the other group of the orientalists who try to prove that the Qur'ân is not simply the Prophet's composition but that it came into being through a process of evolution and amendments during the course of a couple of centuries, their arguments and assumptions revolve mainly round the following themes:[7]

(a) The alleged unreliability of the sources and the history and collection of the Qur'ân.

(b) The assumptions round the recent discovery of certain Qur'ânic manuscripts at Ṣan'â'.

(c) Textual criticism and the alleged copyists' errors in the Qur'ân.

It should have been clear from the above that the orientalists leave no stone unturned to assail the Qur'ân. The following few chapters examine the assumptions and theories of both the groups of the orientalists regarding the Qur'ân. This has been done in three broad sections. In part I, the assumptions

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[1] See for instance W. Muir, *Life of Mahomet,* 3rd edition, reprinted 1923, pp. 25-26; D. S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam,* 3rd edition, London, 1905, pp. 64-65; Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* Oxford, 1960, p. 39 and *Muhammad's Mecca,* Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 50-51.

[2] Muir, *op. cit.,* p. 15; Margoliouth, *op. cit.,* pp. 52-53, 60.

[3] Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca,* op. cit., pp. 52-53

[4] See for instance Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthem aufgenommen?* Bonn, 1833. See also his essay in *Judaism and Islam,* Madras, 1898; Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment,* London, 1926; C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam,* New Work, 1933; A. I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islam,* New York, 1954.

[5] Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca,* pp. 45-46; C. C. Torrey, *The Commercial-Theological Terms of the Koran,* Leiden, 1892; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ân,* Baroda, 1938.

[6] See for instance Richard Bell, "Mohammed's call", *The Moslem World,* January, 1934, pp. 13-19; "Mohammed's visions", *ibid.,* April, 1934, pp.19-34; Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* op. cit., pp.52-58 and his *The Islamic Revelation in the Modern World,* Edinburgh,1969

[7] References regarding these themes are given in the course of discussion in the respective chapters.

and theories of the orientalists about the Prophet's alleged authorship of the Qur'ân have been examined. Part II is devoted to an examination of their assumptions and surmises about the Qur'ânic *waḥy*. In the third part their views and assumptions about the history and text of the Qur'ân, including the views of the "revisionists", have been dealt with.

Part I

On the alleged authorship of Muḥammad (p. b. h.)

CHAPTER I

THE ALLEGATION OF AMBITION AND PREPARATION FOR GIVING OUT THE QUR'ÂN

One line of argument of the orientalists in support of their theory that the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, had himself composed the Qur'ân is that he was an ambitious person who since an early age had made preparations for the role he subsequently played. It is said that since his early youth he had cultivated his linguistic and poetical skill which he subsequently made use of in "composing" the Qur'ân. Further, it has been argued that the traditional view of his being an unlettered person is not quite correct and that at least he knew reading and writing to some extent. The present chapter examines these two lines of argument of the orientalists.

I. ON THE THEME OF AMBITION IN GENERAL

Among the early exponents of the above mentioned views are W. Muir and D. S. Margoliouth who wrote respectively in the later part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. Both of them speak very distinctly about the Prophet's alleged ambition. Muir writes: "Behind the quiet retiring exterior of Mahomet lay a high resolve, a singleness and unity of purpose, a strength and fixedness of will, a sublime determination, destined to achieve the marvellous work of bowing towards himself the heart of all Arabia as the heart of one man."[1] This ambition, adds Muir, was reinforced after Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) arbitration in resetting the Black Stone at the time of rebuilding the Ka'ba, when he was about thirty-five years of age. This incident, according to Muir, "prompted the idea of his being chosen of God to be the Prophet of his people."[2]

Speaking in the same strain Margoliouth asserts: "We know from the Koran that Mohammed was a young man of promise" and that "of his ambition we have evidence in the comfort which his notoriety afforded him at a time when few things were going well with his project: Have we not expanded thy breast and exalted thy name? is the form which the divine consolation takes, when the Prophet is in trouble. Expansion of the breast, the organization of life about a new centre... and celebrity were then things for which he yearned."[3] Margoliouth

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[1] W. MUIR, *The Life of Mahomet*, 3rd edition, 25-26.

[2] *Ibid.*, 29.

[3] MARGOILOUTH, *op.cit.*, 64-65.

suggests that it was the Prophet's ambition and love for achieving personal distinction which prompted him to participate in the *Fijâr* war.[1]

Of the subsequent orientalists who have taken over this theme of ambition on the Prophet's part the most notable is Montgomery Watt. He does not specifically use the term "ambition" in his statements. Instead, he speaks of the Prophet's "consciousness" of his "great organizing ability" and adds a psychological dimension to that consciousness, saying that the Prophet was actuated by a "sense of deprivation" produced, first, by the absence of a father during his childhood and, secondly, by "his exclusion from the most lucrative trade."[2] The hint for this supposed sense of deprivation on the Prophet's part because of his being a posthumous child seems to have been made by Margoliouth, for he states in connection with the Prophet's childhood that the "condition of a fatherless lad was not altogether desirable."[3] Be that as it may, Watt definitely follows Margoliouth in citing the Qur'ânic evidence of divine consolation to the Prophet as a mark of his "preparation for his work as Messenger of God", with the only difference that while the latter invokes the evidence of *sûrah* 94, Watt does that of *sûrah* 93. Thus, describing the years that followed the Prophet's marriage with Khadîjah (r.a.) as "years of preparation" for the work that lay ahead, Watt gives a translation of *'âyahs* 6-8 of *sûrah* 93 and observes that this passage "seems to refer to Muḥammad's early experiences" and that from this "we might perhaps argue that one stage in his development was the realization that the hand of God had been supporting him despite his misfortunes."[4] Citing the same passage, with a slightly different translation, in his latest work and similarly referring to the Prophet's early life and what is called the "preparation for his work as Messenger of God" Watt surmises: "The absence of a father must have produced a sense a deprivation in Muhammad, and the real experience of poverty as a young man may well have nourished the sense of deprivation."[5] "It was most probably his exclusion from the most lucrative trade," concludes Watt, "coupled with his consciousness of having great organizing ability, that made Muhammad brood over the general state of affairs in Mecca."[6]

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
2 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 50-51.
3 MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 46.
4 WATT, *M. at M.*, 39.
5 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 50-51.
6 *Ibid.*, 50.

Thus do the orientalists suggest ambition and preparation on the Prophet's part. It must at once be pointed out that this assumption of personal ambition and preparation on his part to play the role of a prophet-reformer is totally groundless and is not at all sustained by the sources, neither by the text of the Qur'ân, nor by the traditions. The arguments, or rather the surmises adduced in support of the allegation do not stand reason and common sense. Thus, Margoliouth's innuendo that the Prophet participated in the *Fijâr* war to gain personal distinction is totally untenable and contrary to the facts, it being well known that the Prophet was very young at the time of the *Fijâr* wars and that on only one occasion he was taken to the scene of the fighting by his uncle. He did not go there on his own accord or initiative.[1]

More flagrantly wrong is Margoliouth's use of the Qur'ânic evidence in support of his allegation. He says that "Mohammed was a young man of promise" and cites in substantiation of this statement the authority of *sûrah* 11 (*Hûd*), *'âyah* 65. [2] The *'âyah* runs as follows:

فعقروها فقال تمتعوا في داركم ثلاثة أيام ذلك وعد غير مكذوب

"But they hamstrung her (the she camel), so he (Prophet Ṣâlih) said: Enjoy yourselves in your houses for three days. That is a promise not to be belied." (11:65)

This statement, indeed the whole section of the text here, refers to Prophet Sâlih and his warning to his people for their continued disobedience and the retribution that ultimately befell them. The "promise" (وعد) alluded to in the *'âyah* has reference to the warning of retribution which was not belied. By no stretch of the imagination could it be construed to refer to the early promise and determination of Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.h.).

Margoliouth further quotes from *sûrah* 94, giving the translation of its *'âyahs* 1 and 4 as a continuous sentence, omitting the two intermediate *'âyahs* as: "Have we not expanded thy breast and exalted thy name?"[3] Admitting that the passage is a divine consolation to the Prophet at a moment of dejection, it is difficult to see how it refers to his ambition and resolve during his early life to attain celebrity, as Margoliouth concludes from it. Clearly his citation of 11:65 in support of the allegation of "early promise" on the Prophet's part is as misleading as is his interpretation of the *'âyahs* 1-4 of *sûrah* 94 wrong and inappropriate.

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[1] Ibn Hishâm, I, p. 186.

[2] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*,64.

[3] *Ibid.*, 65.

The same remote and inappropriate construction has been put in this connection by Watt on the Qur'ânic passage 93:6-8 (*sûrat al-Ḍuḥâ*). There is no doubt that the passage in question refers to the Prophet's situation in life prior to his marriage with Khadîjah (r.a.). It is also evident that it indicates a "realization" on his part "that the hand of God had been supporting him despite his misfortunes." But that realization was unmistakably posterior to his call to prophethood and it cannot be taken to refer to his state of mind prior to that event. Nor could it imply his mental preparation before the call. Nor does the passage sustain the assumption of a sense of deprivation on the Prophet's part. On the contrary, the predominant note in the passage is that of satisfaction and gratitude for the favourable change in his situation brought about by the hand of God. Whatever sense of deprivation he might have supposedly suffered from, it had clearly yielded place to an unmistakable sense of satisfaction and gratitude after his marriage with Khadîjah (r.a.). And that changed situation and happiness had been continuing for at least 15 years before the coming of the revelation to him, that is, for the very material period which Watt characterizes as the period of "preparation"

Equally wrong is Watt's assumption of the Prophet's "exclusion from the most lucrative trade". Watt of course cites in this connection the well-known Qur'ânic statement at 43:31: "Why was not the Qur'ân sent down to some important man (عظيم) of the two towns (قريتين)."[1]. This passage indicates, as is admitted on all hands, that the Prophet was not at the time of his call one of the leading men of the two towns, Makka and Ṭâ'if. But that does not necessarily mean his "exclusion" as such from the "most lucrative trade". In fact, the theory of a trade rivalry between Banû Hâshim and some other Quraysh clans and the probable exclusion of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) from the most profitable commercial operations, on which Watt bases a number of his conclusions, is, as shown elsewhere, groundless and totally untenable.[2] On the contrary, the expression *fa 'aghnâ* (فأغنى), which is the key-word in 93:8, means, as Watt himself recognizes, not only possession of substantial wealth but also, in Watt's own words, "a place of relative independence and influence in the community." This is confirmed by the well-known fact, also admitted by Watt, that the Prophet, on the eve of his call, had entered into matrimonial relationships with the wealthy and influential 'Abû Lahab on the one hand, and with another very wealthy member of Banû

[1] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 50.
[2] See M. M. Ali, *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists*, vol. IA, pp. 189-190.

Makhzûm, on the other. Thus the suggestion that during the fifteen years from his marriage with Khadîjah (r.a.) to his call to prophethood a sense of deprivation due to poverty and exclusion from the most lucrative trade etc. "made Muhammad brood over the general state of affairs in Mecca" and ultimately play the role of a prophet-reformer is both antithetical to the tenor and purport of *sûrah* 93 and contrary to the well-known facts of his life during that material period of his pre-prophetic life.

Whatever might have been the state of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) mind during the years preceding his call, there is no doubt that he did not suffer from any sense of deprivation. Nor did he make any plans and preparation for playing the part of a prophet. This is clearly evidenced by the Qur'ânic passage 28:86 which states:

و ما كنت ترجوا أن تلقى اليك الكتاب الا رحمة من ربك ....

"You were not wont to expect that the Book would be sent down on you; but (it has been given you) as a mercy from your Lord..." (28:86)

This unequivocal statement of the Qur'ân decisively negatives any ambition or intention on Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) part to become a prophet, though he had occasionally engaged himself in solitary stay and contemplation prior to the receipt of the revelation.

Nor did he ever exhibit by his deeds and demeanour any ambition or intention to become a leader in his community, not to speak of becoming a prophet. It is common knowledge that a leader does not emerge on the scene all of a sudden but through a process of gradual development and preparation which seldom remains concealed from the view and observation of his own people and immediate society. The conduct and activities of the leader-to-be make his society aware of his ambition. Yet, there is nothing on record to suggest that such was the case with Muḥammad (p.b.h.). If he had ever entertained any plan and made any preparation for becoming a leader, that would have been known to his people in some way or other and that would invariably have formed an important item of criticism by his subsequent opponents. But nothing of the kind is discernible from the sources. Till the receipt of the revelation he had not made any mark, by his deeds or demeanour, as an aspirant to leadership in his society. Truly did his adversaries point out, as the Qur'ânic passage 43:31 noticed above shows, that he was not that important a man in the two towns to be the Prophet. Nothing could be a stronger testimony to the lack of preparation and ambition on his part than this statement of the Qur'ân.

That the coming of the revelation was a sudden and unexpected development to Muḥammad (p.b.h) is evident also from the famous tradition recording his immediate reaction to the event. He hurried back home from the mount Ḥirâ', bewildered and trembling in terror and asked his wife to cover him. Then he narrated to her what had happened to him in the cave, expressing his fear that something untoward was perhaps going to happen to him, perhaps he was going to die. She comforted and assured him, saying that Allah could not mean any harm to him since he was so good and honest a man, always speaking the truth, entertaining guests and helping his relatives and the needy, etc. After the initial shock was over she took him to her knowledgeable cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal to ascertain the significance of her husband's experience in the cave of Ḥirâ'. Waraqah, after having heard about the incident, expressed his studied opinion that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had received a commission from Allah similar to what had been previously received by Prophet Mûsâ and that this would involve him (Muḥammad, p.b.h.) in trouble with his own people. This last remark caused further surprise in him.[1]

Now, as Maudûdî points out,[2] several aspects of this report need to be noted carefully. In the first place, the spectacle we get of the Prophet here is that of a person who is clearly bewildered and confused at some unexpected and extraordinary development. Had he ever entertained any ambition, made preparations for playing the role of a prophet or religious leader and expected or solicited any divine communication being made to him, his reaction would have been quite different. He would not have been bewildered and terrified, but would rather have returned from mount Ḥirâ' happy and confident in the success of his endeavours and expectations, not needing consolation and assurance from any one else, and would have at once proceeded to proclaim his commission and mission.

Secondly, the reaction of Khadîjah (r.a.) is equally significant. Had her husband been ambitious and making any preparation for playing the role of a social or religious leader, that fact, of all persons on earth, would have been known at least to her. Hence, when the Prophet returned from mount Hirâ' with his new experience, she would have simply congratulated him on the ultimate success of his experiences and expectations and, instead of taking him to her

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1 *Bukhari*, No. 3.

2 'ABUL 'A'LA MAUDÛDÎ, *Sîrat-i-Sarwar-i-'Âlam*, I, Lahore, 1978, Ch. II.

cousin to obtain his opinion, would have taken other appropriate steps to embark her husband on his new role.

Thirdly, the attitude of Waraqah is similarly noteworthy. He was a close relative of the Prophet and knew him and his background well since his boyhood. Waraqah was also conversant with the Christian scripture and the fact of divine revelation. With that knowledge he instantly came to the conclusion that the stranger who had appeared to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) in the cave of Ḥirâ' could not have been anyone but the angel who used to bring Allah's message to Mûsâ. Had the Prophet been ambitious and desirous of becoming a religious leader and had he been in the habit of receiving instructions in the teachings of Christianity from Waraqah, as is often alleged, the latter's reaction and attitude would have been quite different. He would have either informed Muḥammad (p.b.h.) that he had obtained what he had so long been seeking or, likelier still, would have exposed his preparations and pretensions to the public. That Waraqah did neither of these is in itself an evidence that he neither imparted lessons in Christianity to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) nor was aware of any ambition and preparation on his part to become a socio-religious reformer. On the contrary, Waraqah's reaction clearly shows that by his study of the previous scriptures he had come to learn that the advent of a prophet was foretold in them, that his advent was expected shortly and that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) answered the scriptural description of that awaited prophet. It may further be pointed out that the orientalists, more particularly Watt, state that Waraqah's assurance gave Muḥammad (p.b.h.) confidence in his mission.[1] This acknowledged lack of confidence on the Prophet's part at the very inception of his mission further belies the assumption of ambition and preparation on his part. To these may be added the well-known facts of his denial of any desire for material gains out of his mission and, more particularly, his turning down of the Quraysh leaders' repeated offers of wealth, leadership and power to him in lieu of his abandoning his mission.

Before ending this section it may be noted, however, that the Prophet did of course ultimately become the leader of his people and of the faithful in general. And because of this fact the orientalists seem to read back ambition and preparations on his part into his pre-prophetic life. But having strict regard to the facts and to the sources, and also keeping in view the historical norm that no leader emerges on the scene all of a sudden, the most that can be said is that the

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 59.

coming of the revelation to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) and his call to prophethood was the beginning of that process which ultimately invested him with leadership; it was not the result of his ambition and preparation since his early life. At the time of his call to prophethood he was neither a potential leader nor was known to have aspired after leadership.

II. THE ALLEGED CULTIVATION OF POETICAL SKILL

The second prop for the orientalists' allegation of ambition on the Prophet's part is their suggestion that since his early life he had taken care to develop his linguistic skill which he utilized in "composing" the Qur'ân. Thus W. Muir says that the spectacle of literary and poetical competitions at the 'Ukâz fair excited in Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "a desire after personal distinction", as they also provided him with "rare opportunities of cultivating his genius, and learning from the great masters and most perfect models of the art of poetry and power of rhetoric."[1] And echoing Muir, Margoliouth observes that Muhammad (p.b.h.) might have had some practice in eloquence "in which he afterwards excelled".[2] Margoliouth further states that though the Prophet had some aversion to poetry, the "language of the Koran was thought by experts to bear a striking likeness" to early Arab poetry. Obviously alluding to the poetical competitions at 'Ukâz, to which Muir makes pointed reference in this connection, Margoliouth observes: "Of those lays which were recited on solemn or festive occasions some verses then stuck in his memory and provided the form of future revelations."[3]

It must at once be pointed out that the Qur'ân is not considered a book of poetry by any knowledgeable person. Nor did the Prophet ever indulge in versifying. It was indeed an allegation of the unbelieving Quraysh at the initial stage of their opposition to the revelation that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had turned a poet; but soon enough they found their allegation beside the mark and changed their lines of criticism in view of the undeniable fact of the Prophet's being unlettered and completely unaccustomed to the art of poetry-making, saying that he had been tutored by others, that he had got the "old-world stories" written for him by others and read out to him in the morning and the evening.[4] This allegation also was squarely rebutted by the Qur'ân

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[1] MUIR, *Life of Mahomet*, 3rd edition, 15 (1st edition, II, 7).
[2] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 52-53.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Infra*, p. 18.

As regards the allegation of poetry-making or the Qur'ân being in any way a work of poetry, it strongly denies the charge as follows:

وما علمناه الشعر و ما ينبغى له ان هو الا ذكر و قرءان مبين

"And We have not taught him (the Prophet) poetry, nor is it meet for him. This is naught but a reminding, a Qur'ân, explicit." (36:69)

و ما هو بقول شاعر قليلا ما تؤمنون

"And it is not the saying of a poet. Little is that you believe." (69:41).

In fact, quantitatively speaking, not even one fourth of the Qur'ân is what might be called *saj'* or rhymed prose. Margoliouth himself in effect contradicts his innuendo in two ways. He states at a subsequent stage in his book that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) lacked eloquence and was not a ready debater so that he did not "try his chances" in what is called the "Council Chamber" of the Quraysh.[1] Secondly, while studiously shifting here the burden of opinion on the shoulder of "experts" in the subject Margoliouth himself holds a diametrically opposite view which he put forward subsequently in an independent study on the origins of Arabic poetry in which he advanced the theory that the corpus of what is known as pre-Islamic Arabic poetry was a post-Islamic development modelled on the *saj'* of the Qur'ân.[2] This theory has naturally elicited a good deal of discussion,[3] but the very fact of his having advanced the theory constitutes a direct contradiction by himself of his earlier assertion that the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry "provided the form of future revelations." In fact neither did the Prophet ever in his pre-Prophetic life practise the art of versifying nor is the Qur'ân in any way a book of poetry.

III. THE QUESTION OF LITERACY :WATT'S THEORY

Though alleging that the Prophet cultivated his linguistic and poetic skill, both Muir and Margoliouth hold, in conformity with the sources, that he was an unlettered person. Margoliouth puts it categorically, saying that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "was not as a child taught to read and write, though these arts were known to many Meccans" and "their use in commerce was so great."[4]

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1 MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 72.
2 *J.R.A.S.*, July 1925, 417-449.
3 Ṭâ Hâ Ḥusayn wrote his work *Fî al-Sha'r al-Jâhiliyyah* on the basis of Margoliouth's theory. It elicited a good deal of discussion. See for a concise account Muhammad Muṣṭafâ Hudâra's essay in *Manâhij al-Mustashriqîn*, Pt.I, Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, pp. 396-438.
4 MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 59.

Interestingly enough, by pressing the two facts mentioned here by Margoliouth, namely, the prevalence of literacy among the Makkans and its use in commerce, Watt builds up a theory that the Prophet was not altogether unlettered but knew some reading and writing. To prove this point Watt first cites a number of Qur'ânic statements and a few other facts showing that reading and writing were in vogue at Makka and that these skills were used for both commercial and religious purposes. He then states that in view of these facts "there is a presumption that Muḥammad knew at least enough to keep commercial records.[1]" Watt also cites in this connection parts of the Qur'ânic passages 29:48 and 25:5. They say, respectively, "You were not used to reading any book before it (the Qur'ân), nor to tracing it with your hand" and "Those were old-world fables he had them written down for him".[2] Watt interprets these two passages to say that the first passage means that "Muhammad himself had not read any scriptures" previously, but that a man like Waraqah ibn Nawfal "or some of Muḥammad's alleged informants" had probably read the Bible in Syriac, no Arabic translation being available at that time. As to the second passage Watt says that it "can mean" that Muhammad had the old-world stories written down for him "by secretaries". Thus arguing Watt concludes: "The probability is that Muhammad was able to read and write sufficiently for business purposes, but it seems certain that he had not read any scriptures."[3] Watt further discusses in this connection the meaning of the term *'ummîy* occurring in the Qur'ân. Before dealing with that point, however, it would be worthwhile to discuss the above noted reasoning of Watt's.

It is well-known that some people at Makka at that time definitely knew reading and writing. It is also a recognized principle that when a certain situation or feature prevails *generally* in a given society or country, it gives rise to such a presumption in respect of a particular individual of that society or country. But neither the sources at our disposal nor the instances cited by Watt create the impression that reading and writing was the order of the day at Makka on the eve of the Prophet's emergence, nor that such was the case with any sizeable portion of the then Makkan community, not to speak of a majority of them. Hence there is no case for a presumption of reading and writing in respect of the Prophet. On the contrary, the well-known circumstances of his early life give rise to a strong

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 52.
2 See below for text and further discussion.
3 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 52

presumption that he had not any opportunity or chance for receiving a formal education during the formative years of his life.

Secondly, with regard to the two Qur'ânic passages, 29:48 and 25:5, Watt has quoted them both only partly, has taken them out of their contexts and has put on them wrong and tendentious interpretations not supported by their contexts nor by the tenor of any of the passages as a whole. To see how he has done so it is necessary to quote the passages in original and in full. The text of 29:48 is as follows:

و ما كنت تتلوا من قبله من كتاب و لا تخطه بيمينك اذا لارتاب المبطلون

"And you were not used to reading /reciting any book before this, nor to writing it with your right hand. In that case the prattlers could have entertained doubts." (29:48)

It is clear that the statement has been made in the context of the unbelievers' allegation that the Prophet had himself composed what he was giving out as revelation from Allah. The passage tersely exposes the absurdity of that allegation by simply pointing out the indisputable fact known to every Makkan at that time that the Prophet did not previously use to read and write anything so that it was quite unlikely on his part to have come forward all of a sudden with a remarkable literary work and give it out as Allah's revelation. The implication is all the more clear from the last clause of the *'âyah* which says: "in that case the prattlers could have entertained doubts." It is also noteworthy that the expression *ma kunta* (ما كنت) implies a state of being unused or unable to (read and write). Also the indefinite form in which the word *kitâb* (كتاب) has been used clearly means "any book", not *the book* (الكتاب), which is the form in which the Qur'ân invariably refers to the Bible.

In his translation of the passage Watt of course uses the expression "any book". He also notes in connection with his discussion that there are "many reasons for thinking" that the Prophet "had never read the Bible or any other book". But having said so Watt proceeds to restrict the meaning of the passage to the Prophet's not having read "any scriptures" and adds that though he "himself" did not read the Bible nor wrote it down, persons like Waraqah ibn Nawfal and some of the Prophet's "alleged informants" had read the Bible in Syriac. Needless to say that such an interpretation is not sustained by the passage. Whether Waraqah or any other person had read the Bible in Syriac or in any other language is totally extraneous to the meaning and purport of the passage which speaks only about the Prophet's antecedent. Watt's interpretation is cleverly geared to sustain another assumption which will be discussed shortly, namely, that Muḥammad

(p.b.h.) obtained through others Biblical information and ideas which he embodied in the Qur'ân

More unreasonable, however, is Watt's interpretation of the passage 25:5. To realize this it is necessary to quote the passage along with its immediately preceding and following *'âyahs*. The text runs as follows:

و قال الذين كفروا ان هذا الا افك افتراه و أعانه عليه قوم أخرون فقد جاؤو ظلما و زورا
و قالوا أساطير الأولين اكتتبها فهى تملى عليه بكرة و أصيلا
قل أنزله الذى يعلم السر في السماوات والأرض.......

"(4) And the unbelievers say: This (the revelation) is nothing but a lie which he (the Prophet) has forged and in which another group of people have assisted him. Thus they have come up with an unjust and false allegation. (5) And they say: (These are) tales of the ancients which he has caused to be written (for him); then these are read unto him morning and evening. (6) Say: The One Who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth has sent it down..." (25:4-6).

It is obvious that the statement in *'âyah* 5 is made in rebuttal of the unbelievers' allegations mentioned in the previous *'âyah* 4 and that the passage deals with two types of allegations made by them. The first allegation was that the revelation was a forgery made with the assistance of a group of people. This statement is characterized as an "unjust and false allegation". The passage then refers to another allegation of the unbelievers that the revelations given out to them were "tales of the ancients" which also they further said the Prophet had caused to be written for him by others and then read unto him in the morning and the evening so that he could memorise and repeat them to the people. This is also denied by emphasizing that the "One Who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth has sent it down." The reference to the "One Who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth" made in this connection is just to the point; for, revelation is essentially an intimate affair between Allah and His messenger and none else could be an eye-witness to this process. Indeed, in many places in the Qur'ân it is very rightly stated that Allah Alone is the best witness between the Prophet and his detractors. Most important of all, in connection with both the allegations the unbelievers specifically alleged that the Prophet got the assistance of others in having the text written and read unto him. Clearly, the unbelievers said so because they knew that the Prophet was unable himself to read and write. The passage is thus the strongest proof that he did not know reading and writing.

In dealing with this statement in 25:5 Watt of course recognizes that it was an allegation of the Prophet's pagan opponents that the revelations were "old-world

stories" he had got written down for him; but Watt does not follow the meaning and implication of the statement as a whole. He side-tracks the fact of the denial of the allegation, which is the sole essence and spirit of the passage. Instead, he treats the allegation as an isolated statement and suggests that it "can mean" that the Prophet did not "himself" write down the text but that he had it written by "secretaries". Thus in effect Watt adopts the unbelievers' allegation and suggests that though the Prophet had the text of what he gave out as revelation written by others, he, in reply to his opponents' allegation to the same effect, stated that he *himself* had not written it! Nothing could be a more stark disregard of the context and sequence of the text and a more absurd misinterpretation of it.

If Watt had been a little careful before advancing his interpretation he would have asked himself the vital question, which is the key to the whole situation, namely, why should the Prophet's opponents have made that type of allegation saying that he had obtained the help of others in composing the text of the revelation and had the old-world stories etc. written down for him by others? A moment's reflection would have led to the unavoidable answer that they said so because they and every one of their contemporaries knew full well that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was himself incapable of producing such a literary piece as he was giving out to them as revelation. In fact they did not stop by saying only that the Prophet had the old-world stories written for him. They took care to mention also that he had those stories read or recited unto him in the morning and in the evening. The obvious implication is that they knew also that he could not do his work by simply having the stories etc. written for him; he needed them to be recited or read unto him for the purpose of mastering and memorizing them so that he could reproduce them before men. The omission of this very essential part of the *'âyah* regarding the unbelievers' allegation constitutes the second grave defect in Watt's treatment of it. He avoids mentioning it obviously because it would dismantle his contention. Thus, by completely disregarding the context and tenor of the *'âyah*, by using only a fragment of it and by omitting the second part, which is vitally damaging to his interpretation, Watt attempts to make one of the strongest Qur'ânic statements showing the Prophet's "illiteracy" yield a contrary impression. Watt also does not seem to be aware of the implications of the assumption of mentors or secretaries for the Prophet. If the Prophet had employed others to compose the text of the revelation for him, or, indeed, if he had taken lessons from any one of his contemporaries, he would invariably have

been exposed by those supposed mentors or secretaries, the more so because his claims to prophethood involved his leadership over the whole community including the alleged mentors or secretaries as well.

Having thus grossly misinterpreted the above mentioned Qur'ânic passages Watt concludes: "The probability is that Muhammad was able to read and write sufficiently for business purposes, but it seems certain that he had not read any scripture." Watt further says that this conclusion "gives Muslim scholars all that is essential for apologetic purposes."[1] He then takes up the term *'ummîy* occurring in the Qur'ân and says that though the Muslim scholars take it as implying "complete inability to read and write" it actually means "a people without a written scripture". He refers in this connection to the Qur'ânic passages 2:78, 3:20, 3:75, and 62:2, all of which he says convey the same meaning. Therefore, he concludes, the *'ummîy* Prophet means non-Jewish, gentile or unscriptured Prophet and that this means "that Muhammad had no direct knowledge of the Bible."[2]

Now, Watt's declaration that his conclusion gives Muslim scholars all that is essential for apologetic purposes is supercilious. In saying that Muslim scholars interpret the term *'ummîy* only in the sense of "complete inability to read and write" Watt only betrays the perfunctory nature of his study of the sources. Both classical and modern Muslim scholars clearly state that the term also conveys the sense of being "unscriptured" or "non-Jewish". Thus Ibn Isḥâq, the foremost authority on the *sîrah*, very clearly mentions in explaining the meaning of *'ummiyyîn* : "those who have not received any scripture (الذين لا كتاب لهم).[3] Again, Al-Farrâ' (d. 270 H.) whose *Ma'ânî al-Qur'ân,* is an indispensable reference work on the vocabulary of the Qur'ân, gives one of the meanings of *'ummîy* as "the Arabs who had no revealed scripture" (هم العرب الذين لم يكن لهم كتاب).[4] The same meaning is quoted by Râghib al-Iṣfahânî (d. 502).[5] Even a modern scholar like Maudûdî notes the same as one of the meanings of *'ummîy*.[6]

While accusing the Muslim scholars of having interpreted the term in only one sense, Watt himself in fact attempts to show that at all the places in the Qur'ân where the term occurs it yields only one and the same meaning of being

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 52.

2 *Ibid.*,53.

3 *Ibn Hishâm*, II, p. 220.

4 AL-FARRÂ' (ABÛ ZAKARIYA YAḤYÂ IBN ZIÂD, (d. 270 H.), *Ma'âni al-Qur'ân*, Vol.II, Beirut, n.d., 224 ; also quoted by RAGHÎB AL-IṢFAHÂNÎ, *Al-Mufradât Fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân*, 23.

5 *Ibid.*

6 MAUDÛDÎ, *Tafhîm al-Qur'ân*, Eng. tr. *Towards Understanding the Qur'ân*,(tr. Z.I.ANSARI), Vol.I., Leicester, 1988, pp. 87, 242, 265.

non-Jewish or unscriptured. Thus even with regard to 2:78 where such an interpretation is clearly inadmissible, because the whole description is about the Jews, he imposes that interpretation upon the expression and says that "careful reading of the verse shows that the reference is to the people without a written scripture."[1] That it is not at all so will be clear if we look at the *'âyah* and its context a little carefully. It runs as follows:

و منهم أميون لا يعلمون الكتاب الا أماني وان هم الا يظنون

"And among them are *'ummiyyûn* who do not know the book except *'amâniyya*; and they do naught but conjecture." (2:78)

Watt gives a translation of the *'âyah* up to the expression *'illâ 'amâniyya* as: "among them are *'ummiyyûn* who do not know the book except from hearsay" and adds that the rendering of *'illâ 'amâniyya* as "except from hearsay", which is Pickthall's, "is much disputed but hardly affects the argument." Also, citing Pickthall Watt says that *kitâb* should be translated as scripture.[2]

Watt is right in saying that Pickthall's rendering of the expression *'illâ 'amâniyya* "is much disputed". In fact it is simply wrong; for no standard lexicon or dictionary puts that meaning on it. Its generally accepted meaning is "desires", "whims" or words to the same effect. In fact if Watt had taken the trouble to refer to A. Yusuf Ali's translation, the first edition of which appeared in 1934, only four years after that of Pickthall's, he would have found that the expression has been translated there as "desires". Even A.J. Arberry gives its meaning as "fancies"[3]. Watt seems to have chosen to use Pickthall's translation because he thinks it supports his interpretation of *'ummiyyûn* here as people without a scripture.

But apart from the disputed meaning of *'amâniyya*, the *'âyah* does in no way support the interpretation of *'ummiyyûn* given here by Watt. The whole context of the *'âyah* is a description of the conduct of the Jews of the time. Thus *'âyah* 76 of the *sûrah* speaks of their concealing important aspects of the revelation they themselves had received; while *'âyah* 77 states , by way of a warning to them: "Do they not know that Allah knows what they conceal and what they reveal?" Then comes *'âyah* 78, which is quoted above, starting with the expression: "And among them...", thus continuing the description; and the succeeding *'âyah* 79 refers to their practice of giving out their own compositions as revelations from Allah,

1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 53.
2 *Ibid.*
3 A.J. ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, O.U.P. (Paperback), 10.

thus elucidating one of the ways in which they used to indulge in their *'amâniyya* (fancies) in respect of Allah's revelation. In fact the description and censure continue till *'âyah* 82. Obviously the *'âyah* refers to the *'ummiyyûn* of the Jews, i.e., the uninformed and ignorant ones of them, not to any other group of people. If the reference here was to the Arabs or unscriptured people in general, the expression *wa minhum* (And from among them) would be totally irrelevant and uncalled for; because the Arabs or other non-Jewish people there were all unscriptured.

Even keeping aside the context and taking the *'âyah* in isolation, it is impossible to reconcile Watt's interpretation with it. Thus employing the English equivalents suggested by Watt himself the translation of the *'âyah* would stand as: "And among them are unscriptured people who do not know the scripture (*al-kitâb*) except *'amâniyya...*" It is simply pointless to allege that an "unscriptured people" did not know the scripture! Such a statement, besides being nonsense, does not have the force of censure which is the unmistakable tenor of the *'âyah* in question. The oddity of the interpretation would be all the clearer if we take into consideration the last part of the *'âyah* which, characteristically enough, Watt does not mention. This last clause consists of five words - *wa in-hum 'illâ yazunnûna* - "and they do naught but conjecture." This clause is just in continuation of the censure and in the nature of an elaboration of the term *'amâniyya* used previously in the *'âyah.* Hence this concluding clause of the *'âyah* also will have no force of censure and no sense if the expression *'ummiyyûn* here is taken to imply a people who have not received any scripture; for it is no fault in such a people that they should only conjecture about the contents of *the book*. Thus, whether considered in its context or in isolation the *'âyah* clearly means that "among them", that is among the Jews about whom the whole discussion is going on here, there are *'ummiyyûn*, that is the illiterates and ignorant ones of them who do not take care to study their own scripture, who only follow the dictates of their fancies and indulge in conjectures. Not only that, they also give out their own compositions as *the book* from Allah, as the succeeding *'âyah* 79 says. This latter statement also would be meaningless if the *'ummiyyûn* about whom it speaks is taken to mean a people without a scripture; for there was no question for such a people giving out something as the scripture to the people.

Thus Watt's conclusion is totally wrong and based on a faulty understanding of the *'âyah* in question, and on a still more wrong assumption that the word *'ummîy*

is used in the Qur'ân always and invariably in the sense of an unscriptured people.

Watt thinks that the word *'ummîy* is derived from the Hebrew phrase *ummot ha 'olam* (the peoples of the world of gentiles). Such might have been the case; but there is the more authoritative view that it is derived from the Arabic word *'umm* (mother) and therefore *'ummîy* means a person who has no acquired knowledge except what he received at his mother's cradle. In any case, it is fairly certain that the Jews used to refer to non-Jews as *'ummîy* or unscriptured people. They did so derisively to imply that since the other people did not possess any revealed book they were devoid of knowledge and learning or, in other words, they were ignorant and illiterate. Thus even from the Jews' practice the word bore the meaning of illiterate or ignorant. It may be recalled in this connection that the ancient Greeks also used to refer to all non-Greek (non-Hellenic) people as "barbarians". This word also conveyed not simply the meaning of non-Greek but essentially that of a person beyond the pale of civilization and culture. And it is this latter meaning that ultimately prevailed to the exclusion of the original meaning. Similarly the Arabs used to refer to a non-Arab as *'a'jam*, that is one who is unable to express himself fluently, the original meaning of *'Arab* being one who could express himself fluently. Subsequently the original meaning of *'a'jam* receded into the background and it came to imply simply a non-Arab or foreigner. Again, the ancient Hindus used to call a non-Aryan a *yavana*; but subsequently the word came to denote not simply a non-Aryan, but a non-Hindu, more particularly a Muslim. It is thus clear that such words had both original as well as acquired meanings and that for a period of transition those words bore both meanings. It appears that in so far as the word *'ummîy* is concerned, both its original and acquired senses were in vogue when the Qur'ân was revealed. Hence we find it used in both the senses in the Qur'ân, the exact sense at each place to be determined by the context and tenor of the statement. Also, it is well known that in every language there are many words each of which bears a number of meanings depending on the context and the situation.

As shown above, the term *'ummîy* has definitely been used in the sense of "unlettered" in 2:78. There are five other places where the term occurs in the Qur'ân. In three of these places, namely, 3:20, 3:75 and 62:2, the term occurs in the plural and accusative form and in each of these places it may be taken either

in the sense of illiterate and uninformed people or in that of people without a scripture.

At the other two places, namely, 7:157 and 7:158, it is used in its singular form and as a personal epithet of the Prophet. At each of these places it signifies an unlettered person and it can in no way be taken to mean a person without a scripture or a non-Jewish individual. This would be evident if we simply looked at the relevant parts of these two *'âyahs*. They run as follows:

الذين يتبعون الرسول النبي الأمي الذى يجدونه مكتوبا عندهم في التوراة والانجيل ....فالذين ءامنوا به و عزروه و نصروه واتبعوا النور الذى أنزل معه أولئك هم المفلحون

"Those who follow the Messenger, the *'ummîy* (unlettered) Prophet, whom they find mentioned to them in the *Tawrah* and the *Injil*, ... So those who believe in him, respect him and help him, and follow *the light* which is sent down with him, they are the ones who will succeed." (7:157)

قل يأيها الناس اني رسول الله اليكم جميعا .... فآمنوا بالله و رسوله النبي الأمي الذى يؤمن بالله و كلماته واتبعوه لعلكم تهتدون

"Say O mankind, I am Allah's Messenger to you all... So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the *'ummîy* (unlettered) Prophet who believes in Allah and His Words. And follow him so that you may get guidance." (7:158)

Two points need to be specially noted about these two *'âyahs*. In the first place, while the burden of the first *'âyah* is that the Prophet was sent as Messenger of Allah to Jews as well as Christians "who find him mentioned to them in the *Tawrah* and the *Injîl*", the second *'âyah* states that he was sent to all the people of the world. This being the main burden of the two *'âyahs* it would be quite inappropriate to emphasize here his non-Jewish origin or Arab ethnic affiliation. In fact it would be simply self-defeating to say that a non-Jewish or unscriptured Prophet was sent to the Jews and Christians who had their scriptures. Rather, keeping in view the fact that it was the unbelievers' frequent allegation that what Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was giving out was his own fabrication, and also the fact that the appeal was addressed to a wider audience, it is only natural that the case was put in the way best calculated to rebut the allegation and convince the audience. Second, both the *'âyahs* also say, implicitly as well as explicitly, that the Prophet had been endowed with a revealed book which he himself believed (who believes in Allah and His Words الذى يؤمن بالله و كلماته) and asked his audience to believe in it (and follow *the light* which is sent down with him واتبعوا النور الذى أنزل معه). Thus at both the places the expression can only mean an unlettered or untutored Prophet,

not at all a non-Jewish or unscriptured Prophet. For one thing, it would simply be antithetical to describe him as an "unscriptured" Prophet when he had already received a scripture (*kitâb*) and which he had been asking all the people – Makkans, Arabs, Jews, Christians and "all the people" of the world – to believe. The whole point at issue was whether the scripture he claimed to have received from Allah was to be believed or not. In that situation it simply could not have been said that he was an "unscriptured" Prophet.

Whatever meaning one may like to put on this term, it should once again be stressed that this word is not the sole Qur'ânic evidence of the Prophet's being an unlettered person. As already noted,[1] there are a number of Qur'ânic statements, made mainly in reply to the various allegations of the unbelievers, that unmistakably show that the Prophet was unacquainted with the art of reading and writing and that this fact was so well known to his adversaries that they were forced to modify their lines of attack saying that he had got his texts written down and read unto him by others.

Before leaving the topic it would be worthwhile to mention that Watt opens his discussion by observing that the "main body of later Muslim opinion argued that the Qur'ân was all the greater miracle because Muhammad could neither read nor write..."[2] It must at once be pointed out that Muslims hold that the Prophet was unlettered not because the "main body of later Muslim opinion" argued that for the sake of proving the miracle of the Qur'ân, but because the Qur'ân itself clearly proves him to be so and throws out a continuing challenge to any one to come up with a single *sûrah* comparable to any of its long or short *sûrahs*. Watt's premise and the way in which he misconstrues the Qur'ânic statements in this regard only indicate that he is out to prove the reverse, namely, that the Prophet did know reading and writing and, by implication, the Qur'ân is not much of a miracle. But after all his laboured misinterpretations and faulty arguments he concludes that probably "Muhammad was able to read and write sufficiently for business purposes." Obviously the question his conclusion suggests is: Was it likely or natural for anyone with such modest knowledge of the three Rs and without any prior literary effort of any sort till at least the fortieth year of his life to produce all of a sudden a text which constitutes acknowledgedly "the supreme classic" of Arabic literature? Unfortunately Watt has not asked himself the question, let alone answering it.

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1 *Supra*, pp. 17-20.

2 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 51.

CHAPTER II

THE ALLEGED BORROWING FROM JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN SOURCES

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A good deal has been written on the theme of the Prophet's having allegedly drawn on Judaism and Christianity in formulating his doctrines and teachings. The aim of these writings has invariably been to show, on the one hand, his preparations for the role he played and, on the other, to disprove the divine origin of the Qur'ân. The first modern scholar to advance this line of the assumption seems to be Abraham Geiger[1] who concentrated on the supposed Jewish influence on the Prophet. He was shortly afterwards followed by William Muir who was perhaps the first modern scholar to advance the theory as a whole and did most to popularize it. Since his writings a number of works have appeared on the subject.[2] In 1926 was published Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment.* Shortly afterwards the Jewish case was stated in C. C. Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*[3] and restated in A. I Katsh's *Judaism in Islam.*[4] The sheer volume of these writings calls for an independent treatment of it. The scope of the present work, however, allows only an epitomization and discussion of the main assumptions which are in fact reflected in the works of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt.

II. SUMMARY OF THE ASSUMPTIONS

Muir says that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) obtained his knowledge of Judaism and Christianity through his contact with the followers of those religions in Makka, Madina and the 'Ukâẓ fair, as well as in the course of his trade journeys to Syria. Even as a child he is said to have seen the Jews at Madina, "heard of their synagogue and worship, and learned to respect them as men that feared God."[5] Muir of course rejects as "puerile" the story of a meeting between Nestorius and the Prophet during his second journey to Syria leading Khadîjah's (r.a.) trade

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[1] ABRAHAM GEIGER, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthem aufgenommen?*, Bonn, 1833.

[2] Of such works mention may be made of (a) WILHELM RUDOLPH, *Abhangigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Die Christentunm*, Stuttgart, 1922; (b) TOR ANDRAE, *Der Ursprung des Islams und des Christentum*, Stockholm, 1926 (Fr. tr. *Les Origins de l'Islam le Christianisme*, Paris, 1955); (c) K. AHRENS, "Christliches in Qoran", *ZDMG*, 1930, 15-68, 148-190 (also his *Muhammed als Religionsstiffer*, Leipzig, 1935).

[3] New York, 1933, republished 1967.

[4] New York, 1954.

[5] MUIR, *op.cit*, third edition, 15 (1st edition, II, 8).

caravan to that place. Yet, says Muir, "we may be certain that Mahomet lost no opportunity of enquiring into the practices and tenets of the Syrian Christians or of conversing with the monks and clergy who fell in his way."[1] As specific instances of such contacts, however, Muir mentions only three, namely, (a) the Prophet's having heard as a boy the preaching of Quss ibn Sâ'ida at the 'Ukâẓ fair,[2] (b) the contact with Zayd ibn Ḥârithah whose ancestors, Muir supposes, had been exposed to the influence of Christianity and who, though sold as a slave when a little boy, must have communicated whatever impressions he had of Christianity to Muḥammad (p.b.h.);[3] and (c) the contact with Waraqah ibn Nawfal who, as Muir puts it, "had an acknowledged share in satisfying the mind of Mahomet that his mission was divine."[4] Muir further says that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) must have noticed the differences and conflicts among the Christians and the Jews but nonetheless he obtained from them the idea of One True God, of divine revelation, of a Book and of a name, that of Abraham (Ibrâhîm), which both Jews and Christians repeated with profound veneration and who was "the builder of the Ka'ba and author of the rites observed there by every Arab tribe.". Muir also says that while in Syria the Prophet must have observed what is called "the national profession of Christianity" there. As a result of all these, concludes Muir, Muḥammad (p.b.h.) thought of acting the part of a Christian bishop, "but on a still wider and more catholic scale."[5]

Having said this, and being obviously aware of the differences between the teachings of the Qur'ân and the articles of the Christian faith, Muir attempts to explain the position by saying that the Prophet derived his information from the "orthodox party", the "ecclesiastics and monks of Syria", and thus he obtained a "distorted" and faulty view of Christianity, particularly with regard to Mary and Jesus.[6] Had he been given a correct view, observes Muir, he would have become a Christian instead of founding a new religion. Muir therefore laments that "the misnamed catholicism of the Empire thus grievously misled the master mind of the age, and through him eventually so great a part of the eastern world."[7]

The views thus advanced by Muir were taken over and repeated by subsequent writers. Thus Margoliouth, for instance, builds upon Muir's suggestions and says

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[1] *Ibid.*, 20 (1st edition, II, 18).
[2] *Ibid.*, 15-16 (1st edition, II, 7-8).
[3] *Ibid.*, 34 (1st edition, II, 49-50).
[4] *Ibid.*. (1st edition, II, 52).
[5] *Ibid.*,16 (1st edition, II, 8-9).
[6] *Ibid.*, 20-21 (1st edition, II, 19-20).
[7] *Ibid.*

that in the course of his trading activities Muḥammad (p. b. h.), picked up information, most of it from "conversations (e.g.) at wine-shop or from listening to story-tellers" among whom were "Jewish dealers who traded in clothes."[1] From such intercourse with the Arabian Jews and Christians the Prophet is said to have "derived a sort of biblical phraseology".[2] Also, he is said to have been so engrossed in business that "traces of this calling are found all over his Sacred Book."[3] Like Muir, Margoliouth also says that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) got the idea of a Prophet, of divine revelation, of a Book, etc. from the Jews and Christians and that the Prophet's knowledge about these two systems was faulty and "superficial".[4] Margoliouth adds, however, that as time went on the Prophet's knowledge about the biblical stories improved. There "is no question", writes Margoliouth, "that as the Koran grew in bulk, its knowledge of biblical stories became somewhat more accurate: and though this greater degree of accuracy may have at times been due to the Prophet's memory, it is more likely that he took such opportunities as offered of acquiring more information."[5]

But while Muir laments that a distorted view of Christianity prevented Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) ultimate conversion to that system, Margoliouth seeks to explain that outcome in terms of the Prophet's design and personal ambition. The part which the Prophet played, says Margoliouth, was "present to his mind for many years, suggested by conversations with Jews and Christian and Parsees", all of whom had "one thing which the Arabs had not: a legislator, who had acted as divine commissioner... Yet each nation ought to have a leader. Here then was an opportunity for a Prophet."[6]

Echoing Muir's view that the Prophet observed and was impressed by the "national profession of Christianity" in Syria, Margoliouth says that when he (the Prophet) visited countries where "the whole population was subjected to the law of God" he was convinced of the backwardness of his own country and of the need for reform which he decided to carry out by assuming the role of a prophet and by means of a revelation which he saw as "an indispensable preliminary of progress."[7] He did not think of either Judaism or Christianity because, according

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[1] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 60.
[2] *Ibid.*, 58-59.
[3] *Ibid.*,69. Here Margoliouth refers to C.C.Torrey's *Commercial-Theological Terms in the Koran*, Leiden, 1892, without specifying the author and title of the work.
[4] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 76-77.
[5] *Ibid.*, 106.
[6] *Ibid.*, 73.
[7] *Ibid.*, 74.

to Margoliouth , Christianity "could not be dissociated from subjection to the suzerainty of Byzantium and Mohammed was far too great a patriot to contemplate the introduction of a foreign yoke." Also, even if converted to "an established religion, he could not have pretended to such knowledge of it as older members possessed."[1] Hence he decided to reproduce the role of Moses or Jesus. "Being a cool-headed student of human nature", further states Margoliouth, Muḥammad (p.b.h.) could see that "they were men, and what they had done he could do."[2] His plans are said to have been facilitated by the prevailing differences between the Jews and the Christians and between the latter's rival sects, and at Madina he "claimed that it was his mission to put them right where they disagreed."[3]

These Muir-Margoliouth assumptions have been adopted and developed by Watt. Thus, he deals rather elaborately with what he calls the "relation of Islamic teachings to Judaeo-Christian sources" and states that "one of the theses" of his book, *Muhammad at Mecca*, is that the greatness of Islam is largely due to a "fusion" of some Arab elements "with certain Judaeo-Christian conceptions."[4] He sets the theme on a wider plane and speaks about the influence of these "sources" upon the then Arabs in general, or rather on Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) environment, as well as upon him individually.[5] Like his predecessors Watt holds that the concept of monotheism was derived mainly from Christianity and Judaism. Though not excluding the possibility of influence from the monotheistic groups like the *ḥanîfs* he discounts any "movement" as such towards monotheism[6] and asserts that the "premonitions of monotheism among the Arabs must have been due mainly to Christian and Jewish influences."[7] Like Muir and Margoliouth, again, Watt traces these influences through the Arabs' contact with the Jews and Christians in Arabia and with the Byzantine Empire, which was Christian and "whose power and civilization they greatly admired", and also Abyssinia and even Al-Ḥîrah, which "was an outpost of the East Syrian or Nestorian Church."[8] Watt also repeats the Muir-Margoliouth assumption that the idea of prophethood was derived from Judaism and Christianity. The "idea that Hûd and Ṣâlih were

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1 *Ibid.*, 77.
2 *Ibid*.,78.
3 *Ibid.*,76-77.
4 WATT, *M. at M.*, 23.
5 *Ibid.*, 25-29 and Excursus B, pp. 158-161; and *Muhammad's Mecca*, 36-38.
6 *M. at M.*, 28; *Muhammad's Mecca*, 37-38.
7 *M. at M.*, 27.
8 *Ibid.*

prophets to 'Âd and Thamud", writes Watt, "was probably a pre-Qur'anic instance of the application of the Judaeo-Christian conception of prophethood."[1]

Having thus spoken of the "indirect environmental influence" Watt comes to the question of "direct" influence and says that there is "good evidence" showing that the Prophet had a "monotheist informant".[2] This "good evidence" he seeks in the Qur'ânic statement, 16:103, which, it may be mentioned here, is cited also by Nöldeke and Margoliouth to suggest that the Prophet had an informant.[3] This passage gives a lie to the unbelievers' allegation to the same effect by pointing out that the person they hinted at spoke a foreign tongue, but the Qur'ân is in clear Arabic.[4] Watt does not, however, cite Margoliouth. Instead, he adopts C.C. Torrey's peculiar interpretation of the passage[5] saying that it shows that the Prophet did not deny having a human teacher but only insisted that the teaching came from heaven.[6]

Proceeding on the basis of that assumption Watt next develops what Margoliouth says about the supposed growth in accuracy in the Prophet's knowledge of Biblical stories with the passage of time. Watt cites some seven Qur'ânic passages, which we shall presently notice, to show what he calls the "growth in accuracy of the acquaintance with Old Testament stories, particularly with regard to Abraham and Lot."[7] He adds that "there are a great many" of such examples of growth in accuracy, without of course citing them, and says that in view of these it is difficult for the "western critic" to resist the conclusion that the Prophet's "knowledge of these stories was growing and that therefore he was getting information from a person or persons familiar with them."[8] In this connection Watt further refers to the Qur'ânic passage 11:51 which says that neither the Prophet nor his people previously knew the stories of the Prophets revealed to him. Watt says that the "embarrassment caused by such a verse to those who want to uphold the sincerity of Muhammad" (p.b.h.) could be resolved by supposing that he did not make any distinction between the "story" and the "teaching" implicit in it and by interpreting the term *nûḥî* (We reveal) occurring in

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1 *Ibid.*, 28.
2 *Ibid.*, 27 and Excursus B, p. 159.
3 Margoliouth, *op.cit.*, 106-107.
4 The passage runs as: لسان الذى يلحدون اليه أعجمى و هذا لسان عربي مبين
5 C.C.Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam, op.cit.*, 43f.
6 Watt, *M. at M.*, Excursus, B, p. 159.
7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.*

the passage to mean we "cause to understand the teaching implicit in it or the significance of", etc.[1]

Reiterating the same views in his latest work and further citing the Qur'ânic statement in 25:4 Watt states that there might have been more than one informant for Muhammad (p.b.h.) and that the Qur'ân "does not deny that Muhammad was receiving information in this way" but that it merely insists that the material thus received "could not have been Qur'ân, since a foreigner could not express himself in clear Arabic." Watt thus once again states that what the Prophet received from his informants "would be factual knowledge" but the "meaning and interpretation of the facts" came to him "by the usual process of revelation."[2]

Further, Watt recapitulates and expands the Muir-Margoliouth assumption that the Prophet had obtained certain distorted and mistaken notions of these two religions and those notions were reproduced in the Qur'ân. Avoiding Muir's insinuation against the "orthodox party" and the Syrian Church Watt says that "the particular Jewish and Christian groups which influenced the Arabs" had "many strange ideas". Examples of such strange notions, asserts Watt, are the Qur'ânic statement which "suggests that the Trinity consists of Father, Son and Mary". This statement, emphasizes Watt, "is doubtless a criticism of some nominally Christian Arabs who held this view". Watt further states that "much of the detail" from the Jewish side also was incorporated in the Qur'ân, but this came "not from the sacred scripture but from secondary sources of various types."[3]

The same thing he repeats in his latest work saying that "some people in Mecca wrongly supposed certain beliefs to be held by Jews and Christians", namely, "that Christians took Jesus and Mary to be two gods apart from God, and that 'Uzayr [Ezra] to be the son of God."[4] These Qur'ânic statements, asserts Watt, "are palpably false" because "these were beliefs held by the Meccans" and because, according to him, "it was not essential for God's purposes that false ideas of this sort should be corrected", for He addressed the Arabs "in terms of their existing beliefs" and the Qur'ânic message could be communicated "without correcting these beliefs."[5] Elaborating the same assumption Watt states that the

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1 *Ibid.*
2 *Muhammad's Mecca*, 45.
3 *M. at M.*, 27-28.
4 *Muhammad's Mecca*, 2, 45.
5 *Ibid.*, 2, 44.

Qur'ân addresses the Arabs in the first instance, speaking "in terms of their world picture", including even points in which that picture was "mistaken". In support of this statement he refers to the prevailing notion of the earth being a flat space and quotes some seven Qur'ânic passages to show that that mistaken notion was reproduced in the Qur'ân.[1]

Again, like Muir and Margoliouth, more particularly the latter, Watt states that Muḥammad (p.b.h.), having observed the unsatisfactory social condition of his land and people, and having been convinced of the need for bringing about a reformation, thought that this could be done by means of a revelation or religion. As Watt puts it, Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "may even have decided that this [unsatisfactory state] could be got rid of by some form of religious belief."[2] Echoing Margoliouth in a remarkable way, Watt further suggests that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) launched a new monotheistic movement in order to avoid the political implication of adopting Judaism or Christianity; "for Christianity was linked with the Byzantine and the Abyssinian empires, and Judaism had support in the Persian empire. In effect Islam gave the Arabs a monotheism independent of the empires."[3] Watt winds up his discussion by adopting in effect Bell's observation that for "the study of the life of Muhammad it is hardly necessary" to delineate the relative importance of Jewish and Christian influences; for, he admits, "many details are disputed". "The main necessity", he emphasizes, "is to realize that such things were 'in the air' before the Qur'ân came to Muhammad and were part of the preparation of himself and of his environment for his mission."[4]

Thus do the orientalists advance identical views and arguments. In general, these arguments revolve round the following five assumptions:

(1) The circumstantial or environmental influence of Judaism and Christianity;

(2) The alleged specific instances of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) contact with particular Christian individuals;

(3) The supposed Qur'ânic evidence about his informant or informants;

(4) The supposed gradual growth in accuracy in the Qur'ân's narration of the biblical stories; and

(5) The alleged reproduction of contemporary scientific errors in the Qur'ân.

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[1] *Ibid.*, 2, 5-7. The Qur'anic passages quoted are: 2:22, 13:3; 20:53; 51:47-48; 71:19-20; 78:6-7 and 79:27-33. See below for discussion on these passages.

[2] *Ibid.*, 51.

[3] *Ibid.*, 38.

[4] *M. at M.*, 29

The following is a discussion of the first four categories of arguments. The fifth, the alleged errors in the Qur'ân, is dealt with separately in the next chapter.

III. ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE IN GENERAL

It is an acknowledged fact that there were Jews and Christians in Arabia; the former mainly at Yathrib (Madina) and the latter mainly at Najran. So far as Makka, the birth-place of the Prophet and the immediate scene of his activities was concerned, there were only a few Christians of humble social and intellectual status, being either slaves or petty retailers, and mostly immigrants. One or two original inhabitants of Makka like 'Uthmân ibn al-Ḥuwayrith and Waraqah ibn Nawfal had turned Christians, the former out of personal or political considerations, and the latter as a result of his search for a better faith. Also the Makkans conducted trading operations with such countries as Syria and Abyssinia where Christianity prevailed. It is therefore quite understandable that the knowledgeable section of the Makkan community, including Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had been aware of both Judaism and Christianity as systems of religion and did doubtless also know something of the common beliefs and practices of the votaries of those religions. Indeed all the three of our scholars, Muir, Margoliouth and Watt, are at one in stating, after all their arguments, that Muḥammad's knowledge of Christianity was at best second-hand, "superficial" and erroneous. Margoliouth even states that one reason why Muḥammad (p.b.h.) did not embrace either of these religions was that he realized he could not pretend to such knowledge of it as its older members possesses. Now, this being obviously the most that the orientalists think was the level of Muḥammad's supposedly acquired knowledge of the two religions, the question that naturally suggests itself to the general reader is: Is it reasonable to assume that a person of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) intelligence and common sense, as on all hands he is admitted to have been endowed with, would proceed to propound a new religion and challenge the correctness of both the prevailing systems of Judaism and Christianity on the basis of a mere hearsay and superficial knowledge of these systems of faiths? The orientalists, although they spare no pains to prove ambition and preparations on the Prophet's part to play the role he did, would just not address themselves to this simple and natural question. The inherent weakness and inconsistency in the orientalists' approach lies in the fact that they suggest , on the one hand, that the Prophet was ambitious and therefore careful enough to avoid the political

implications of embracing either Judaism or Christianity and, on the other, that he was careless enough to proceed to found a new religion by picking up information from bazaar gossips and Jewish story-tellers at wine shops!

The fact is that it is as naive to say that Islam is an amalgam of second-hand information about Judaism and Christianity with some Arab elements, as it is absurd to suggest that the Prophet was not cognizant of the two religious systems. There is no doubt that the concepts of prophethood, revelation and of Allah as Supreme Lord were known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. The existence of these concepts does not, however, *ipso facto* prove they were derived from the Jews, although the latter undoubtedly possessed these concepts as well. In so far as the concept of prophethood is concerned, the memory of Ibrâhîm as Prophet and founder of the Ka'ba which the Arabs universally cherished, and the Abrahamic rites like *ḥajj* or pilgrimage to the Ka'ba were unquestionably pre-Jewish and pre-Christian. Similarly the concept of Allah as Supreme Lord was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs independently of any Jewish or Christian influence. The concept was in fact a remnant of the teachings of Ibrâhîm which had spread in Arabia before the coming into existence of either Judaism or Christianity. So was the concept of *ḥanîf* as a worshipper of one God, which also finds mention in the Qur'ân. The orientalists of course recognize the existence of the concept of Allah among the pre-Islamic Arabs; and of late Watt pays special attention to this point.[1] But while quoting a number of Qur'ânic passages that clearly show the existence of this concept of Allah among the pre-Islamic Arabs, and while quoting Teixidor's study of the inscriptions to show that belief in a high or supreme God was common throughout the Semitic Near East in the Greco-Roman period[2] and thus trying to illustrate the Prophet's indebtedness to the prevailing ideas, Watt is very careful in not tracing this concept of a "high God" in any way to the so-called Judaeo-Christian influence. Nor does he explain how this particular concept came into existence and continued to survive among the polytheistic Arabs. He of course suggests, like Margoliouth, that the "archaic" religion or paganism was in decline because, according to him, of a growing awareness of the powerlessness of the gods and goddesses.[3] Also, following others, he attempts to explain the composition of the word Allah.[4] Yet, neither

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 31-36.

2 *Ibid.*, 35, quoting Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Period*, Princeton, 1977, pp. 17, 161.

3 WATT, *M. at M.*, 23-24; *Muhammad's Mecca*, 35. See also MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 24.

4 WATT, *M. at M.*, 26-27. See also Hitti, *op.cit.*, 100-101.

this nor the supposed decline in paganism does in itself explain the emergence of the concept of Allah as "high God".

As regards the concept of monotheism the Qur'ân, and for that matter the Prophet, accused the contemporary Arabs, Jews and Christians of having deviated from the original teachings of their prophets and of having degenerated into polytheism. There is thus no question of his having taken over the concept of monotheism from the Jews and the Christians, because he so unequivocally controverted and rejected what they said to be the teachings of their scriptures. In fact, even a cursory glance at the Qur'ân unmistakably brings out two undeniable facts. First, the Qur'ân does not claim any originality in the sense of presenting a new religion. It claims merely to revive and fulfil the same message which it maintains — and here is its originality – Allah has given to all the Prophets throughout the ages and to every people. More specifically, it claims its teachings to be the same as those of Prophets Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ and 'Îsâ (p.b.t.), about all of whom it speaks in glowing terms. Second, it very uncompromisingly rejects and denounces the polytheistic beliefs and practices of the contemporary Arabs and also of the Jews and Christians. These two-fold notes of the Qur'ân are just the reverse of what the orientalists suggest. They say that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had no first-hand knowledge of their scriptures. He had neither read them himself, nor was any Arabic version of them available at the time. The Qur'ân, and for that matter the Prophet, emphatically say, on the other hand, that their teachings are essentially the same as those of the original scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. Secondly, the orientalists insist that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) derived his knowledge from those of his contemporary Jews and Christians whom he happened to meet. The Qur'ân, and therefore the Prophet, insist that the contemporary Jews and Christians were mistaken and misguided and had deviated from the teachings of their original scriptures, particularly in respect of monotheism.

The only conclusion which any reasonable and impartial observer can draw from this situation is, first, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) did not make up his teachings by picking up information from here and there; for in that case he would have feigned originality, would not have traced his teachings to the previous scriptures or would have at least so chosen his audience as were not likely to detect the sources of his information. Secondly, he had not obtained his information from his contemporaries because he found fault with them and set about to reform

them and to bring them back to the original teachings of the previous prophets. Thirdly, since, while saying that his teachings were the same as those of the previous scriptures, he at the same time stated that he had not read any of them, and since the orientalists also agree that he had not read any of those scriptures, his source of knowledge must have been something else than either a first-hand perusal of those scriptures or a second-hand knowledge of them obtained from his contemporaries.

Some of the orientalists, particularly Watt, of course suggest a third possibility, that of there being a monotheist informant or informants for the Prophet. This assumption raises more questions than it solves. The so-called Qur'ânic evidence on which this assumption is based would be examined presently. It may only be noted here that the Qur'ân, far from indicating that the Prophet had any human informant, does just the opposite thing of denying such allegation made by the unbelievers.

It has also been suggested, particularly by Margoliouth, that the Prophet, having got the name of Ibrâhîm from the Jews and the Christians, traced his teachings to him in order to claim precedence over both Judaism and Christianity. Further, it has been said that the Prophet's denunciation of the Jews and the Christians began after his break with the former at Madina. These two suggestions are manifestly untenable. The Abrahamic tradition, the Ka'ba and the rites connected with them existed there for ages before the Prophet's birth. If he had invented the tradition and thus related his teachings to Ibrâhîm, he (the Prophet) would have been simply ridiculed not only by his adversaries but also by his followers. Secondly, the rejection of the concept of sonship or fathership of God and the assertion that both the Jews and the Christians had deviated from the teachings of their original scriptures had been very distinctly made in the Makkan *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân, long before the migration to Madina and the subsequent development of enmity with the Jews of that place.

The truth is that it was impossible to get an impression of monotheism by any amount of observation of and acquaintance with the Judaism and the Christianity of the day. Even a perusal of the extant scriptures would have hardly conveyed such an impression. The God in the Old Testament is depicted as essentially a tribal god, openly partial to the children of Israel. Such a god could scarcely attract the imagination, far less the adoration, of a non-Israelite population. The New Testament, on the other hand, obscured and blurred the concept of One

God by inextricably tagging it with the manifestly difficult and admittedly mysterious doctrine of the Trinity which conceived God not in easily understandable Unity but in "God the Father", "God the Son" and "God the Holy Ghost", these being not distinct qualities of a single entity but three distinct and separate entities. Moreover, the doctrine of incarnation on which the concept of "God the Son" rests is essentially no different from the same doctrine of the Hindus. Like the Christians, a modern Hindu, while acknowledging the existence of many gods and goddesses and a sort of Trinity in the existence of Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva (*Trîdeva*), would equally assiduously assert that his sacred texts do in the ultimate analysis speak of One and Only True God,[1] though a non-Hindu finds it difficult to accept that Hinduism inculcates monotheism. And so far as the practices of the Jews and the Christians of the time were concerned, these were acknowledgedly beset with the most debasing corruption and superstitions and as such they were the farthest removed from being model monotheists. Muir indirectly admits this fact when he squarely decries what he calls the "misnamed catholicism" of the Empire and the "orthodox party" of the Syrian church. The situation indeed continued to deteriorate for several centuries after the emergence of Islam. In fact, the various reform movements in Christianity, particularly the Cluniac Movement, the Iconoclastic Movement and the Reformation started by Martin Luther bear an eloquent testimony to the depth of corruption and superstition into which the Christians and the Christianity of the day had degenerated. In a way, all these reform movements and the subsequent emphasis on monotheism, in spite of the adherence to the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, are by and large an impact of the uncompromising monotheism enunciated and propagated by Islam. In any case, so far as the state of Christianity in the 7th-8th century Syria and the neighbouring lands were concerned, it was more likely to repel than to attract any outside observer. Truly has it been said that the "self-conceit" which deludes one to assume that the spectacle of "national" profession of Christianity in Syria impressed the "young reformer" Muḥammad (p.b.h.) has no foundation in historical fact.[2]

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[1] See for instance the modern Vedandists' views, particularly the views expressed by Devendranath Thakur and his associates in the mid-nineteenth century, M. M. ALI, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities, 1833-1857*, Chittagong, 1956, chapters II and III.

[2] HUART, "Une nouvelle source du Koran", *Journal Asiatique*, 1924, p. 129. See also George Sale, *Observations Historiques et Critiques sur le Mahometisme*, 68-71.

V. THE ALLEGED INSTANCES OF CONTACT WITH JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN EXPERTS

The orientalists emphasize the well-known facts of the Prophet's two journeys to Syria, once in company with his uncle when he was about twelve years of age, and again as leader of Khadîjah's (r. a.) caravan when about twenty-five years of age. On both these occasions he is said to have come across a Christian monk, Bahira on the first occasion and Nestorius on the second. As already pointed out, doubts and improbabilities surround these traditions and the orientalists themselves, particularly Muir, reject the stories as "puerile". Nevertheless he assumes that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "lost no opportunity of enquiring into the practices and tenets of the Syrian Christians or conversing with the monks and clergy who fell in his way." The same assumption is made in a more exaggerated way by Margoliouth; while Watt also subscribes to the view saying: "Muhammad had presumably some contact with Christians on his trading journeys to Syria."[1]

It must be emphasized that the trade journeys were made to a predominantly or wholly Christian land. There is thus no question of not making any contact with Christians. What is necessary to note is that there is no reference whatsoever in the sources to the Prophet's having taken advantage of those journeys to seek information about Christianity from any particular monk or any Christian individual. Even the doubtful accounts of meeting with Bahira and Nestorius speak only of the enquiries and opinions of those two individuals, and not at all of the Prophet himself. Also, on the occasion of the reported meeting with Bahira the Prophet was a mere boy of about twelve and therefore unlikely to engage in any serious academic discussion. Nor could the nature of the journeys afford him any leisure to seek diversion in such educational exercise. If he had made any such educational contact, it would have not escaped unnoticed by the scores of others of the leading men of Makka who had accompanied him on both the occasions and many of whom subsequently opposed his mission. Yet, we find from the Qur'ân that the unbelieving Quraysh leaders accused the Prophet of having allegedly received instructions only from a foreigner who happened to be in Makka and further alleged that a group of other people, also presumably in the city, composed the text of the revelation for him and read it unto him morning and evening. Had Muḥammad (p.b.h.) contacted during his trade journeys to Syria any Christian monk or layman for obtaining information or even for casual

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[1] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 36.

discussion, the Quraysh opponents, many of whom had accompanied him to Syria, would not have failed to make the most of it in their attack against him. That no such allegation was made by them is a decisive proof that he had not sought information about Christianity or Judaism from anyone in the course of his journeys to Syria.

The second so-called instance is the tradition relating to Quss ibn Sâ'ida to which Muir refers specifically and Margoliouth alludes indirectly. It is stated that the Prophet heard Quss preach at the 'Uakâẓ fair[1]. This tradition is unanimously classified as spurious and is rejected as such.[2] Specially, one of its narrators, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥallâj al-Lakhmî, is condemned as a confirmed liar (*kadhdhâb*).[3] And even according to this spurious report, the Prophet was only one of the audience and did not make any enquiries as such with the speaker. The orientalists' use of this report without any indication of its weakness and untrustworthiness is indicative of how such materials are uncritically accepted and cited to support a particular assumption.

Similarly weak is the "instance" of Zayd ibn Ḥârithah of which Muir makes special mention. It is to be observed that Muir tactfully refrains from saying directly that Zayd or his parents were Christians, but indirectly introduces the subject by saying that Christianity had made progress among Zayd's ancestors and suggests that Zayd, though a boy when sold as a slave, must have remembered something of Christianity and must have communicated that knowledge to his foster father Muḥammad (p.b.h.). Nothing could be a more far-fetched inference than this; for whatever the boy Zayd had learnt about Christianity and of that whatever he could have managed to remember after his disconnection with that system for at least a quarter of a century, it could be of very little use to any serious enquirer and would-be-reformer. Moreover, had Zayd acted in any way as teacher in Christianity for the Prophet and had the latter formulated his doctrines on the basis of the knowledge imparted to him by Zayd, the latter would surely have no genuine faith in the Prophet's mission and would not have followed him so dedicatedly till his death.

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[1] The tradition is recorded in a number of works. See for instance 'ABU AL-QÂSIM SULAYMÂN IBN AḤMAD AL-ṬABARÂNÎ, *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabîr* (ed. 'ABD AL-MAJÎD AL-SALAFÎ), XII, 88-89; NÛR AL-DÎN AL-HAYTHAMÎ, *Majma' al-Zawâ'id wa Manba' al-Fawî'id*, IX, Beirut, 1986/1406, pp. 421-422; AL-BAYHAQÎ, *Dalâ'il al-Nubuwwah*, I, 453, 454-456 and 457-465.

[2] See for instance 'ABÛ AL-FARAJ IBN AL-JAWZÎ, *Al-Mawḍû'at*, I, 213-214; AL-SUYUṬÎ, *Al-La'âlî al-Maṣnu'ah*, I, 183-1192; 'ABÛ AL-ḤASAN 'ALI IBN MUḤAMMAD IBN 'IRÂQ AL-KANÂNÎ (907-963), *Tanzîh al-Sharî'ah al-Marfu'ah 'an al-'aḥâdîth al-Shanî'ah al-Mawḍû'ah*, I, 3rd impression, Beirut, 1981, pp. 241-243.

[3] See for instance AL-DHAHABÎ, *Mîzân al-I'tidâl Fî Naqd al-Rijâl* (ed. 'ALI MUḤAMMAD AL-BAJJAWÎ), III, No. 7351, p. 509; *Al-'Iṣabah*, III, No. 7349, pp. 279-280.

As regards the instance of Waraqah ibn Nawfal, great emphasis has indeed been placed on it by the orientalists. There is no doubt that Khadîjah (r.a.) took the Prophet, shortly after his receipt of the first revelation, to Waraqah for consultation. This fact, as already pointed out, shows on the one hand that the Prophet did not entertain any ambition or intention to play the role of a Prophet. On the other hand it shows that on his part Waraqah also considered him a sincere and unpretentious person. Had the Prophet previously received instruction in Christianity from Waraqah, he would have formed a very different opinion about the former. In fact, except for this meeting, there is no indication in the sources of the Prophet's having previously consulted Waraqah on any subject, though under the circumstances it is reasonable to assume that the two knew each other from close quarters. The same reason which has been indicated above in connection with the Prophet's journey to Syria and his alleged acquisition of Christian knowledge in the course of that journey may be adduced the more strongly in the present case. Had the Prophet been in the habit of receiving instruction in Christianity from Waraqah, that would have formed a very strong point in the Quraysh leaders' attack on and criticism of the Prophet.

IV. THE SUPPOSED QUR'ÂNIC EVIDENCE ABOUT A MONOTHEIST INFORMANT OR INFORMANTS

This brings us to the subject of the Qur'ânic statement about the Makkan leaders' allegation that the Prophet received instruction from others. It is mainly on this allegation of the unbelievers that Watt and his predecessors have based the assumption of a monotheist informant or informants for the Prophet. In doing so, however, Watt, or rather C. C. Torrey, from whom he has taken his cue, has grossly misinterpreted the Qur'ânic texts. To see how this has been done it is necessary to quote in original the couple of passages cited by Watt in support of his assumption. These passages together with Watt's translation, stand as follows:

و لقد نعلم أنهم يقولون انما يعلمه بشر لسان الذى يلحدون اليه أعجمي و هذا لسان عربي مبين

"We know they say : It is only a person teaches him. The tongue of the one they hint at is foreign, but this (the Qur'an) is (in) a clear Arabic tongue." [16:103] (*Muhammad's Mecca*, 45).

و قال الذين كفروا ان هذا الا افك افتراه و أعانه عليه قوم ءاخرون .... و قالوا أساطير الأولين اكتتبها فهى تملى عليه بكرة و أصيلا

"The unbelievers say, This is only a falsehood he invented; other people helped him with it... They said, Old-World fables, he has had written; they are dictated to him morning and evening." [25:4-5] (*Ibid.*)

Watt, following Torrey,[1] interprets these statements, particularly the first, saying "that Muhammad does not deny having a human teacher but only insists that the teachings came down from heaven."[2] Elaborating the same statement Watt writes in his latest work that "the Qur'an does not deny that Muhammad was receiving information in this way" but only "insists that any material he received could not have been the Qur'ân, since a foreigner could not express himself in clear Arabic". Hence what he was given by the informant "would be factual knowledge, whereas the meaning and interpretation of the facts would come to him by the usual process of revelation."[3]

This interpretation of Watt (and Torrey) is totally wrong. It is also an attempt on Watt's part to fit in these texts, particularly the first passage, his notion of revelation (*waḥy*) which he describes "prophetic intuition", a form of the Prophet's own "consciousness", something in the nature of "meaning" and "interpretation" distinct from the facts and words, etc. That notion of Watt's will be discussed when we come to the subject of revelation.[4] Here it should be noted that the most that can be made out of the first passage (16:103) is that there was a foreign person at Makka who had presumably had some knowledge of either Christianity or Judaism and who happened to be an acquaintance of the Prophet. Obviously this fact was taken advantage of by the Prophet's opponents to allege that he was being "taught" by that person to produce what was being given as revelation. The Qur'ân refers to this allegation by way of denying it and giving a lie to it. By no stretch of the imagination could it be suggested that the Qur'ân does not deny the fact of receipt of information from the person alluded to and that it merely "insists" that the material thus received "could not have been the Qur'an, since a foreigner could not express himself in clear Arabic." This latter phrase, "could not express himself in clear Arabic", is Watt's own interpretation or "tendential" shaping. The clear statement of the Qur'ân is that the tongue of the person insinuated is *'a'jamî*, i.e., "foreign"; and this is a very strong form of denial of the unbelievers' allegation. But even allowing the twist in meaning given by Watt, does it at all sound logical to say that a foreigner, who could not express himself in clear Arabic, would nonetheless be able to instruct the Prophet, who by all accounts did not know any foreign language, in the details and subtleties of Christianity and Judaism?

[1] C.C.TORREY, *The Jewish Foundation etc., op.cit,*, 43ff.
[2] WATT, *M. at M.*, 159.
[3] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 45.
[4] *Infra*, chaps. VI and VII.

In fact it is grossly misleading and somewhat inconsistent to say, as Torrey and Watt do, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) does not deny having a "human teacher but only insists that the teaching came down from heaven." If the insistence was that "the teaching came down from heaven", does it not constitute a denial of a human teacher? But the insistence was not simply on that the teaching came down from heaven. It was more strongly and consistently stated that the "text" of the revelation also came from the heaven. In fact the main challenge of the Qur'ân was and has been to any one to come forward with a *text* similar to any of its *sûrahs*. The unbelievers' allegation also had reference to the preparation of the text of the revelation by the person insinuated; not with regard to the mere fact or information contained in the revelation. The term *yu'allimu* in contemporary Arabic parlance meant not simply imparting information but communicating a text which was usually committed to memory, transmission of knowledge being at that time almost wholly oral. And because the allegation had reference to the text of the revelation, the denial of it is made all the stronger by simply pointing out the utter unreasonableness of the insinuation, that is, by pointing out that the person insinuated was simply incapable of producing a clear Arabic text. The denial contains also an element of ridiculing the insinuation. Indeed the nature of the unbelievers' allegation is more clearly specified in the second passage, 25:4-5, quoted by Watt and to which we shall presently turn our attention.

Watt's interpretation of the passage 16:103 is wrong in three ways. In the first place, it totally ignores the context which is that it refers to the unbelievers' allegation for the sake of giving a lie to it.[1] This is clear not only from the passage itself but also from its two immediately preceding *'âyahs*, (i.e. 101 and 102). Thus *'âyah* 101 refers to the unbelievers' allegation that the Prophet was a "forger" and then rebuts it by saying that those who indulged in such allegation did not really know. "They say, thou art a forger; but most of them know not."[2] The same denial is continued and stated in a positive form in *'âyah* 102 which emphasizes that the revelation was truly brought down from "your Lord" by the angel Jibrîl – "Say, it has been brought down by the Spirit of Holiness (Jibrîl) from your Lord."[3] *'Âyah* 103, which is quoted by Watt, is merely a continuation of the same topic of

[1] It may be noted that Watt and his preceptor Bell tend to belittle the context in interpreting a Qur'anic passage by assuming that the unit of revelation was almost always a short passage. But no sudden change of subject-matter, nor the style of language, nor of the form of address from third person to first person, etc., which according to them indicate the disconnection of a particular passage from its preceding or following *'âyahs*, are applicable in the present instance.

[2] The text runs as follows: قالوا انما أنت مفتر بل أكثرهم لا يعلمون

[3] The text runs as: قل نزله روح القدس من ربك

the unbelievers' allegation and the same emphatic denial of it. In fact the expression: "And indeed We know they say" (و لقد نعلم أنهم يقولون), particularly the particle and pronoun *'annahum* clearly indicate this connection with the previous *'âyahs*. In his interpretation, thus, Watt ignores the context altogether and in effect simply adopts the allegation of the Prophet's adversaries.

Secondly, Watt and Torrey are mistaken in saying that the Qur'ân does not deny what he calls the receipt of information from the foreigner. Leaving aside the context, the *'âyah* 103 itself contains an unmistakable denial in the term *yulḥidûna*. It bears a derogatory sense and a reproach, namely, that of deviation from the truth and the just course, or perversion. All the competent authorities are agreed that *'ilḥâd* means "falsely stating" or "falsifying", *takdhîb* (تكذيب).[1] In fact the very verb *yulḥidûna* occurs at two other places in the Qur'ân, namely, 7:180 and 41:40; and at both these places it clearly means a wrongful and unwarranted act[2]. Significantly enough, A.J. Arberry in his translation of the Qur'ân renders the expression at both the places as blaspheming - "and leave those who blaspheme His names" and "Those who blaspheme Our signs."[3] More important still, the Qur'ân itself uses the root-word *' ilḥâd* in apposition to *ẓulm* or injustice at 22:25;[4] and A.J. Arberry rightly translates it :"And whosoever purposes to violate it wrongfully" etc.[5] Hence, though Watt and Torrey translate the expression at 16:103 as simply "they hint at", its correct rendering should be "they wrongfully suggest", "they unjustly hint at", "they unfairly insinuate", or some such words. It may further be pointed out that the Arabic equivalent of "they hint at" is *yushîrûna 'ilâ*, not *yulḥidûna 'ilâ*. Thus the correct meaning of the *'âyah* 16:103 should be: "We indeed know they allege that a human being tutors him. The language of the individual they unjustly insinuate is foreign, while this (the Qur'ân) is in clear Arabic". Thus, far from there being no denial of the allegation, the text of the *'âyah* clearly labels it as an *'ilḥâd*, an unjust insinuation.

Thirdly, Watt also ignores the decisive rebuttal contained in the last part of the *'âyah* where it is emphasized that the language of the individual they unjustly

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[1] See for instance IBN AL-'ATHIR, *Al-Nihâyah Fî Gharîb al-Ḥadîth wa al-'Athîr*, Pt. IV; AL-ZAMAKHSHARÎ, *Al-Kashshâf*, II, Beirut, n.d., II, 429; AL-QURṬUBÎ, *Tafsîr*, Pt.VII, 328 and Pt. X, 178 and MUḤAMMAD IBN 'ALÎ AL-SHAWKÂNÎ, *Fatḥ al-Qadî etc.*, Pt.I, second impression, 1964/1383, p. 270 and Pt. III, 195.

[2] The two statements run respectively as: (7:180) و ذروا الذين يلحدون في أسمائه سيجزون ما كانو يعملون

ان الذين يلحدون في ءاياتنا لا يخفون علينا (41:40)

[3] A.J.ARBERRY, *The Koran*, O.U.P. (Oxford Paperbacks), 1986, pp. 165, 495.

[4] The text runs as: (22-25) و من يرد فيه بالحاد بظلم نذقه من عذاب أليم

[5] A.J.ARBERRY, *op.cit.*, 336.

insinuate is "foreign". There is in fact a two-fold denial of the allegation in this single statement. In the first place, since the person spoke a foreign tongue, it was impossible on the Prophet's part, who did not know any foreign language, to follow that person's "instruction" or "exposition". Secondly, as the Qur'an is in clear Arabic, it could not have been composed for the Prophet by that individual. Thus neither in the sense of communicating what is called "facts" or "information", nor in the sense of formulating the text and wording of the revelation could the foreigner act as "trainer" for the Prophet.

The denial of the unbelievers' insinuation is continued in the immediately following two *'ayahs* (16:104-105). *'Âyah* 104 warns the unbelievers against the evil consequences of their rejection of the "signs" of Allah, and *'âyah* 105 retorts by saying: "It is but they who believe not in the signs of Allah that forge falsehood; and they are the ones who lie."[1]

Thus 16:103 together with its immediately preceding and following couple of *'âyahs* constitute a distinct unit of which the purport is to deny and rebut the unbelievers' allegation in a very positive, forceful and unmistakable manner. It should also be noted that there is nothing in these *'âyahs* that warrants the assumption that the unbelievers were referring only to the receipt of information or facts as distinguished from their "meaning" and "interpretation", as Watt would have us believe. On the contrary, the nature and wording of the denial, especially the emphasis on the language of the person insinuated, make it obvious that the allegation had reference to the Prophet's inability to produce, by himself, the text of the revelation.

This nature of the unbelievers' allegation is more specifically spelt out in 25:4-5 which Watt quotes and which should be considered along with 16:103. The passage 25:4-5 says that the unbelievers' allegation was that the Prophet had the text of the revelation, which to them was only "old-world fables", *written* for him and dictated to him morning and evening. It is noteworthy that in translating this passage Watt omits the last part of *'âyah* 4 which reads فقد جاؤوا ظلما و زورا , which means: "they have indeed come up with an injustice and falsehood". Watt omits to mention this last clause of the *'âyah* obviously because it contradicts his false suggestion that there is no denial in the Qur'ân of the allegation made by the unbelievers.

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[1] The text runs as: (16:105) انما يفترى الكذب الذين لا يؤمنون بآيات الله و أولئك هم الكاذبون

This passage 25:4-5 or rather this *sûrah* is unanimously regarded as earlier than *sûrah* 16 in the order of revelation.[1] This is all the more reason why the allegation contained in 16:103 should be considered in conjunction with the allegation in 25:4-5; for it would be obviously absurd on the unbelievers' part first to suggest that the Prophet had the passages of the revelation written for him by others and recited by them to him morning and evening, and then to state that he had only obtained the "facts" and "information" from an individual. It is thus obvious that the allegation of incapacity on the Prophet's part to produce the revelation by himself had reference not simply to the "facts" and "information" but to the text and language of the revelation as well. But whether one likes to assume that the allegation had reference to facts and information alone, or whether one admits the obvious fact that the allegation had reference to both the facts and the text, the concluding part of *'âyah* 25:4, which Watt chooses to withhold from his readers, characterizes the unbelievers' allegation as a manifest injustice (*ẓulm*) and a palpable falsehood (*zûr*). Nothing could be a stronger and clearer denial than this.

Watt does mention that the Muslim commentators of the Qur'ân are not in agreement about the identity of the person or persons "hinted at" by the unbelievers and give several names, "mostly of Christian slaves" in Makka.[2] But what Watt fails to do is that he does not complete the story; nor does he pursue the questions that naturally arise out of his assumption. These questions are: (a) Why, after Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had come forward with his claim to Prophethood and after he had passed some time in publicly calling people to believe in his mission – why any knowledgeable Jew or Christian should have come forward to help promote his claim by supplying him with information about Judaism and Christianity? (b) Why the Quraysh leaders, with their power and influence and

[1] This *sûrah* (*al-Furqân*) is placed between the 38th and the 42nd in the order of revelation by classical Muslim scholars. On the other hand, orientalists like RODWELL and NÖLDEKE count it as the 66th in the order of revelation, and MUIR places it as the 74th. *Sûrah* 16 (*al-Naḥl*), on the other hand, is placed between the 67th and 72nd by the Muslim scholars; while RODWELL and NÖLDEKE place it as the 73rd, MUIR puts it as the 88th and A. JEFFERY as the 46th. (See MUHAMMAD KHALIFA, *The Sublime Qur'ân and Orientalism*, London and New York, 1983, Appendix II; and MUḤAMMAD 'IZZAT DARWAZAH, *Sîrat al-Rasûl etc.*, I. Beirut, n.d. [1400 H.], pp. 145-149.

[2] Watt, *Mumammad's Mecca*, 45. Several names were indeed suggested. The most frequently mentioned name is Jabr, a Christian slave of Al-Fakîh ibn al-Mughîrah, who had embraced Islam. Ibn Isḥâq says that this Jabr was a slave of Banû al-Ḥaḍramî. Another name suggested is Ya'ish, a slave of Banû al-Ḥaḍramî or Banû al-Mughîrah, or of Banû 'Âmir ibn Lu'ayy. It is further said that Banû al-Ḥaḍramî had two slaves, one named Jabr and the other named Yâsar or Nabt. They were sword-smiths and the Prophet is stated to have occasionally visited them and talked to them. Ibn 'Abbâs says that the person referred to was Bal'am, a Christian who had some knowledge of the Bible. According to Al-Qurṭubî, the person alluded to was a Greek Christian at Makka named Maysara. Another report says he was 'Addâs, a servant of 'Utbah ibn Rabî'ah. A still another view is that he was 'Abs, a servant of Ḥuwayrith ibn al-'Uzzâ. See AL-QURṬUBÎ, *Tafsîr*,X, 177-178 and AL-ZAMAKHSHARÎ *Al-Kashshâf*, II, 429.

their knowledge and control of affairs of the then not very big town of Makka, and especially of their constant watch upon the activities of the Prophet and his acquaintances – why did they not make use of any such "informant" to expose the Prophet's "pretensions"? (c) If, on the other hand, such "informant" or "informants" were from among the Christian and Jewish converts to Islam, why should they have continued to have faith in the Prophet's mission and leadership when they found out that he needed their knowledge and help in formulating what he gave out as revelation from Allah? Significantly enough, Watt does not raise these very pertinent questions, let alone answering them. If he did raise the questions, he would have found that the Muslim commentators have made it clear that the Quraysh leaders made the allegation in question because of the existence in the ranks of the Muslims a few Christian converts and that the Makkan leaders did not stop by simply making the allegation. They tortured a number of such converts in order to extort an admission from them to the effect that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had obtained help from them. It is further mentioned that one of such victims of oppression, Jabr, when persecuted and tortured to the extreme, gave out the significant reply: "It is not I who teaches Muhammad, rather it is he who teaches and guides me."[1]

V. THE SO-CALLED GROWTH IN ACCURACY IN BIBLICAL INFORMATION

Indeed, it does not at all stand to reason that a person of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) intelligence and common sense would obtain from hearsay and secondary sources a perfunctory and superficial knowledge of the contents of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, which is what the orientalists suggest at the most, and would then proceed, on the basis of that knowledge, to utter doctrines and stories claiming them to be divine revelation. Yet the orientalists not only advance such an absurd proposition but even go further to suggest in effect that the Prophet was simpleton and rash enough to give out as revelation whatever little he learnt at first of a particular Old-Testament story and subsequently modified or improved upon it as he learnt more of it. Thus, citing a number of Qur'ânic passages relating to Ibrâhîm and Lût (p.b.t.) which will be considered presently and which he thinks show "the growth in accuracy of the acquaintance with Old-Testament stories" Watt concludes that "Muhammad's knowledge of these stories was

[1] AL-QURṬUBÎ, *Tafsîr*, X, 177.

growing and that therefore he was getting information from a person or persons familiar with them."[1]

The passages cited by Watt are 37:135 C; 26:171 E(D); 27:58 E(D); 7:81 D-E; 15:60 DE; 1:83 E+ and 29:32 E+. It may be noted that Watt follows Flugel's numbering of the *'ayahs* which differs slightly from the current and standard numbering; but there is no difficulty in identifying the passages by looking at the meaning. He does not quote the passages in original, nor does he give their translation. Also, while citing only one *'âyah* of each *sûrah* he evidently has in view a number of them relating to the topic. The letters placed beside each *'âyah* number are, as Watt mentions, indicative of Bell's dating of the passages, C standing for Makkan, E for early Madinan and E+ for Madinan period.[2]

It may be noted at the outset that the assumption of "growth in accuracy" is based essentially upon the above mentioned dating of the passages. But this dating is acknowledged to be only "provisional"[3] and Watt himself entertains doubts about its accuracy[4]. Moreover, in his latest work he discards Bell's dating in favour of R. Blachère's which closely follows that of Nöldeke.[5] Also the way in which two letters indicating two different periods, sometimes one in brackets, are placed beside an *'âyah,* is confusing. It should also be noted that all the passages cited are counted as Makkan by the classical Muslim scholars. In any case, an assumption of gradual growth in accuracy based upon a system of dating about the accuracy of which the author himself is in doubt and which he discards in his latest work is hazardous and misleading.

Apart from the question of dating, however, the passages cited by Watt to prove his view themselves do not really sustain the theory of "growth in accuracy" as such. Thus, the first point which Watt attempts to make is that in the two first mentioned passages (37:135 and 26:171) the member of Lûṭ's "party" not saved is "an old woman", in all the other passages it is his wife. This statement of Watt's is not correct and is clearly a misunderstanding of the two passages in question. The statement at both the places starts with *'illâ*, "except", which shows that it is merely a continuation of what precedes in the passage. It is to be noted that in the *'âyah* preceding at each place the material term is *'ahl.* Hence the meaning at both the places is that all of Lûṭ's *'ahl* except "an old

[1] WATT, *M. at M.*, 159 (Excursus B).
[2] *Ibid.*, IX.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] WATT, "The dating of the Qur'an: A review of Richard Bell's theories". *J.R.A.S.*, 1957, pp. 46-56 (especially pp. 54-65)
[5] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 4.

woman" were saved. The primary meaning of *'ahl* is "family", even "wife"; while in a secondary or extended sense it may mean "people" or "inhabitants". This secondary meaning is clearly inadmissible here; for it is obviously not the intention of the passages in question to say that all of Lûṭ's people were saved except an old woman. Nor could it be suggested that among all those of Luṭ's people who were punished and destroyed, there was only one old woman. The obvious meaning of the two consecutive *'âyahs* at each of the two passages (37:134-135 and 26:170-171) is that all the members of Lûṭ's family were saved except "an old woman". Thus at both the places Lûṭ's relationship with her is expressed in an indirect way. The term "old woman" is used here out of disapproval of her unbelief, not out of an ignorance of her relationship with Lûṭ. In all the other places, however, the relationship is expressed directly and explicitly. There is thus no case of inaccuracy in the first two passages, nor of "growth in accuracy" in the other five passages.

Similarly ill-conceived is Watt's second point. He says that in the above mentioned passages there is "no awareness of the connexion between Abraham and Lot"; whereas in the other passages "there is explicit mention of the connexion with Abraham."[1]

Now, a reference to the passages 15:60, 11:83 and 29:32 shows that "the connexion between Abraham and Lot" which Watt finds in them is only an indication of their contemporaneity. This comes out as an incidental detail of the manner in which Allah's wrath and punishment befell Lûṭ's people. These passages tell that Allah sent some angels who, on their way to Lûṭ's people, also met Ibrâhîm, gave him the good tidings of another son to be born to him and informed him that they were going to Lût's people to punish them. Thereupon Ibrâhîm made some pleadings for Lûṭ. Obviously, this incidental detail was not called for in the other passages where the theme and context are different . In fact, the emphasis of the first four passages (37:135; 26:171, 27:58 and 7:81) is on Allah's favours upon the Prophets mentioned and how they were helped to emerge successful through their trials and the enmity of their own people. The emphasis of the other three passages (15:60, 11:83 and 29:32) is, on the other hand, on the conduct of the Prophets' opponents and the evil consequences of their opposition to and rejection of the message delivered to them. The first group of four passages are addressed mainly to the Prophet and his followers by

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1 WATT, *M. at M.*, 159

way of reassuring and consoling them; the other three are addressed mainly to the unbelievers by way of warning them about the ultimate evil consequences of their disbelief and opposition. Hence in the first group of four passages no details are given of the retribution that befell the rejecters of the truth, nor is there a mention of the angels who acted as the agents of such retribution upon the people of Lûṭ. On the other hand, in the other three passages such details are given, including the coming of the angels through whose conversation with Ibrâhâm the so-called "connexion" between him and Lût appears. There is thus here, again, no deficiency as such in the first four passages, nor any growth of accuracy in the other three passages.

It should be mentioned here that the Qur'ân refers to historical events and the stories of the previous Prophets not for the sake of narrating history or telling a story; it does so essentially for the sake of illustrating a lesson or drawing a moral; most frequently to emphasize the fact that all the Prophets preached the doctrine of monotheism (*tawḥîd*). Hence different or the same aspects of the life-story of a particular Prophet are mentioned at different places; and nowhere is a particular historical event or the story of a Prophet narrated in full and at a stretch, as is usually the case with ordinary history or story books. This apparent repetition or partial narration of the stories has been seized by the orientalists to advance the theory of "growth in accuracy". But a careful look at the passages, or rather the *sûrahs,* would at once expose the speciousness of the theory. It may also be pointed out that the mere non-mention of a detail, which is not called for by the theme and context at one place, and the mention of that detail at another place where the theme and context demand it, is no ground for suggesting inaccuracy in the first instance, and growth in accuracy in the second. Again, even the gradual unfolding of facts and details does not in itself prove that a human informant or informants were supplying information to the Prophet. The whole of the teachings of Islam in the Qur'ân, the rules and duties, are indeed spelt out gradually and over a period of some twenty-three years. To cite this fact as proof of the Prophet's supposedly gradual acquisition of knowledge from some human tutor or tutors would be a height of presumption.

Apart from these reasons, a closer look at the passages shows that there is indeed no deficiency in information as such in the four first mentioned passages or *sûrahs.* For, not to speak of the Prophets sent to the 'Âd and the Thamûd peoples (i.e. Hûd and Ṣâlih), who are mentioned in them but who do not find any

mention in the Bible, even with regard to Ibrâhîm such details are given in these *sûrahs* as are not to be found in the Old-Testament. Thus, it is in these *sûrahs* that Ibrâhîm is depicted as a propagator of monotheism and a very clear account is given of his struggles for its sake, his argumentation with his father and people over their mistaken beliefs, his denunciation and breaking of the idols, his ordeal by fire, his travel to Hijaz, etc. None of these aspects of his life-story is mentioned anywhere in the Old-Testament. On the other hand, in the other three passages where a "growth in accuracy" is assumed on account of the mention in them of the coming of the angels and their conversation with Ibrâhîm, it is noteworthy that the Qur'ânic account of this incident differs materially from that of the Old-Testament. For instance, it is clearly mentioned in the three passages under reference that Ibrâhîm grew curious about his "guests" (the angels in human forms) only when they declined to partake of the meal prepared for them, which led to their disclosing their identity and their further conversation with him including the giving of the good tidings of another son to be born to him and their commission about the punishment of Lûṭ's people. The Old-Testament, on the other hand, simply states that as soon as Ibrâhîm saw "three men" he "ran to meet them from the tent door", invited them to be his guests, and on their acceptance of it, prepared a meal for them, "and they did eat" of it.[1] Similarly they "did eat" the food prepared for them by Lûṭ.[2] Thus neither is a case of deficiency in information established in respect of the first four passages in question, nor is a case of dependence upon the Old-Testament details proved in respect of the other three passages. In both the instances the Qur'ân goes beyond the Old-Testament and also differs materially from it. Hence the sources of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) information must have been other than the extant Old-Testament and any other human being conversant with it; and no theory of "growth in accuracy" can logically be sustained here.

Indeed, far from denying the receipt of information from an "informant" or "informants", the Qur'ân throws out a challenge declaring that neither the Prophet nor his people previously knew the facts that were being revealed to him. Thus 11:49 says: .... تلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيها اليك ما كنت تعلمها أنت و لا قومك من قبل هذا

"That is of the tidings of the unseen, that We reveal to thee: thou didst not know them, neither thou nor thy people, before this..." (11:49)[3]

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[1] Gen. 18:1-8.
[2] Gen. 19:3
[3] The translation is that of A.J. Arberry, *op.cit.*, 217, with slight modification.

This *'âyah* together with some others to the same effect are some of the strongest Qur'ânic evidences showing that the Prophet had no previous knowledge of what was being revealed to him. Hence, as in the case of the Qur'ânic evidence in support of the Prophet's "illiteracy"[1], so in this instance too Watt has misinterpreted this *'âyah* in order to sustain his assumption. Thus, proceeding on the basis of his assumption that the Qur'ân shows the Prophet's receipt of information from some one, Watt states that this *'âyah* 11:49 poses an "embarrassment" to those "who want to uphold the sincerity of Muhammad" and then attempts to explain away this supposed embarrassment by having recourse to his peculiar notion about revelation (*wahy*). He says that the facts and information about the prophetic stories came from human sources, but the "teaching" and "ulterior significance of the stories came to Muhammad by revelation".[2] But having said this Watt seems to recall his general thesis that even in respect of ideas and concepts the Prophet borrowed them from Judaeo-Christian sources. Hence Watt hastens to add that since "Judaeo-Christian ideas had become acclimatized in the Hijaz", the ideas that the Qur'ân presupposed did not require to be specially communicated", but that the "precise form" in which they were to be "integrated so as to be relevant to the contemporary situation, could have been given them only by the prophetic intuition."[3]

It must at once be pointed out that the assumption of the Prophet's having received information from any human source is totally groundless and wrong. Also it is true that the Prophet and his people did not know the facts that were being given through the revelation. Hence the *'âyah* quoted above does in no way pose an embarrassment; nor is there any need for explaining away that supposed embarrassment by reducing the meaning and scope of revelation to merely "the precise form" in which the stories or the ideas were to be "integrated" so as to make them relevant to the contemporary situation.

That the Prophet was receiving the facts (as well as the text) through the revelation is clear from the Qur'ânic passages themselves. The key word in the passage quoted above (11:49) is *'anbâ'* (أنباء). Watt himself translates this word as "stories". Nonetheless he suggests that their "teaching" and "significance" only should be understood. This suggestion is made just for the sake of fitting his

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1 *Supra*, pp. 15-20.
2 Watt, *M. at M.*, 160.
3 *Ibid.*, 160-161.

assumption in this *'âyah* . The plain Arabic equivalent of *'anbâ'* is *'akhbâr* (أخبار); and both mean "facts" or "accounts"; and A.J. Arberry's rendering of the expression as "tidings" comes nearer to conveying the correct meaning. Indeed *'anbâ*, when it emanates from Allah,[1] means "facts" and "true accounts" without the slightest doubt or untruth about them. But even if Watt's translation of the word as "stories" is allowed, there is nothing here or elsewhere in the Qur'ân to sustain the claim that it means merely "teaching" and "significance" to the exclusion of the facts. It may be noted that besides the various derivatives from the root, the word *naba'* (نبأ) in its singular form occurs in the Qur'ân at some seventeen places,[2] while the plural form *'anbâ'* in some 12 places.[3] At each of these 29 places it signifies facts and circumstances. It is not necessary to look into all these places. It would suffice if we look at only the two other places, besides 11:49 where it has been used with the same emphatic assertion that the Prophet had no prior knowledge of what was coming to him as revelation. One of these places is 3:44 which runs as follows:

ذلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيه اليك و ما كنت لديهم اذ يلقون أقلامهم أيهم يكفل مريم و ما كنت لديهم اذ يختصمون

"That is of the tidings of the unseen , that We reveal to thee; for thou wast not with them, when they were casting quills which of them should have charge of Mary; thou wast not with them when they were disputing."[4]

And the other *'âyah ,* 12:102, runs as follows:

ذلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيه اليك و ما كنت لديهم اذ أجمعوا أمرهم و هم يمكرون

"That is of the tidings of the unseen that We reveal to thee: thou wast not with them when they agreed upon their plan, devising."[5]

It is noteworthy that the last part of each of these two *'âyahs* beginning from "thou wast not with them" is an explanation of the *'anbâ'* given to the Prophet and it refers to specific facts and circumstances, not to mere "meaning" and "significance" of some facts.

The same emphasis on the Prophet's innocence and lack of prior knowledge of the facts that were being revealed to him is reiterated (though without the specific expression *'anbâ'*) in another highly expressive Qur'ânic passage, 28:44-46, which runs as follows:

و ما كنت بجانب الغربي اذ قضينا الى موسى الأمر و ما كنت من الشاهدين. و لكن أنشأنا قرونا فتطاول عليهم العمر و ما كنت ثاويا في أهل مدين تتلوا عليهم ءاياتنا ولكن كنا مرسلين. و ما كنت بجانب الطور اذ نادينا لكن

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[1] Watt of course does not admit that the revelation received by the Prophet was from Allah .

[2] Q. 5:27; 6:34; 6:67; 7:175; 9:70; 10:71; 14:9; 18:3; 26:69; 27:22; 28:3; 28:21; 38:67; 38:88; 49:6; 64:5 and 78:2.

[3] Q. 3:44; 6:5; 7:101; 11:49; 11:100; 11:120; 12:102; 20:99; 26:6; 28:66; 33:20 and 44:4.

[4] A.J. ARBERRY, *op.cit.*, 51.

[5] *Ibid.*, 237.

رحمة من ربك لتنذر قوما ما أتاهم من نذير من قبلك لعلهم يتذكرون

"Thou wast not upon the western side when We decreed to Moses the commandment, nor wast thou of those witnessing; but We raised up generations, and long their lives continued. Neither wast thou a dweller among the Midianites, reciting to them Our signs; but We were sending Messengers. Thou wast not upon the side of the Mount when We called; but for a mercy from thy Lord, that thou mayest warn a people to whom no warner came before thee, and that haply they may remember." (28:44-46).[1]

All these Qur'ânic passages (11:49; 3:44, 12:102 and 24:44-46) are unequivocal confirmations of the Prophet's innocence and lack of prior knowledge of the facts and circumstances he was giving out by means of the revelation to him. They also constitute irrefutable contradictions of the assumption that he received facts and ideas from human sources and then had had recourse to "revelation" in order to obtain only "the precise form" in which they were to be integrated so as to make them relevant to the contemporary situation. Also, these passages are, as already pointed out, in the nature of challenges to the Prophet's contemporary adversaries who similarly insinuated that he received information from some human beings. It should be noted that every part of the Qur'ân was given out to the public the moment it was revealed. In fact the various allegations of the unbelievers and their rebuttal as they occur in the Qur'ân are themselves unmistakable proofs of instant publication of the texts of the revelations. And keeping in view the dates of revelation of the above mentioned passages, which vary from early Makkan to mid-Madinan periods (and Watt himself classifies the first mentioned passage, 11:49, as C-E+, i.e., early Makkan to mid-Madinan period), it is evident that the challenge was repeated not only at Makka but also at Madina where there were a number of well-informed Jews who were against the Prophet. Yet, there is no indication in the sources of their having taken up the challenge in any way, nor of their having pointed out any individual or any other source from which Muḥammad (p.b.h.) could have obtained the information. Nor, as already pointed out, could the unbelieving Quraysh leaders, in spite of their ceaseless efforts and inhuman torturing of the few Christian converts at Makka, elicit an admission from them that they had taught the Prophet anything.

VI. DIFFERENCES IN THE QUR'ÂNIC AND BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

That the above mentioned passages relate to facts and also prove that the Prophet did not receive the facts from any person conversant with the Bible is further evident from the factual differences that are noticeable in the Qur'ânic

[1] *Ibid.*, 396-397.

and Biblical accounts of the same Prophets. The first mentioned passage, 11:49, occurs in the context of the account of Nûḥ. Unlike the Old-Testament, it is the Qur'ân which specifically mentions that he preached monotheism and called his people to the worship of Only One God. Again, unlike the Old-Testament, it tells that the deluge did not come except after Nûḥ had faced all sorts of opposition and troubles in the cause of his mission and except after he had become despaired of his people ever receiving guidance, and also except after God had revealed to him that they would not believe. Thirdly, it is the Qur'ân which mentions that only those who believed in God were saved. The Qur'ân also refers to what happened to Nûḥ's son for his refusal to accept the truth and how he was drowned. Fourthly, the Old-Testament says that God became repentant (?) for His having caused the devastation and resolved never again to do so and, in order to remind Him of His resolution and "covenant" with Nûḥ, set a bow (rainbow) in the sky, thus implying also the weakness of forgetfulness on His part.[1] It is more with reference to such facts as are not mentioned in the Old-Testament but are stated clearly in the Qur'ân that it challengingly tells the Prophet that neither he nor his people previously knew them.

Similarly the second passage, 3:44, comes in the context of the story of Maryam and 'Îsâ (Mary and Jesus). The differences between their story in the Qur'ân and that in the New Testament are more remarkable. The passage itself refers to the incident of her care and protection which information is wanting in the New Testament. Second, the Qur'ân clears her of all imputations of being an unworthy character and emphatically declares her purity and chastity and states that Allah selected her as the noblest lady for the extraordinary honour of being mother of Îsâ – "O Maryam, Allah has chosen thee and purified thee, chosen thee above the women of all the nations."[2] At the same time it makes it very clear that she was no more than a human being and that she was as much in need of praying to Allah as anyone else - "O Maryam, worship thy Lord devoutly, prostrate thyself and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down."[3] As regards 'Îsâ, the Qur'ân mentions even such of his miracles as are not related in the New Testament. For instance, his speaking to the people while he was in the cradle,[4] his giving life to clay birds by Allah's permission,[5] and the table that

1 Gen. 8:21 and 9:11-16.

2 Q. 3:42. The text runs as: و اذ قالت الملائكة يا مريم ان الله اصطفاك وطهرك واصطفاك على نساء العالمين

3 Q. 3:43. The text runs as: يا مريم اقنتى لربك واسجدى واركعى مع الراكعين

4 Q. 3:46.

5 Q. 3:49; 5:113.

descended unto him from the heaven are mentioned only in the Qur'ân. Besides these, so far as the conceptual aspects are concerned, the Qur'ân categorically says that 'Îsâ was no more than a Prophet, that he was not god,[1] nor a "son of God",[2] nor one of the Trinity,[3] nor was he crucified.[4]

The third of the passages, 12:102, comes at the end of the story of Yûsuf which the Qur'ân designates as "the most beautiful of stories" (*'ahsan al-qasas*). This story is told in the Qur'ân throughout in a note of spirituality which is lacking in the Old Testament. The distinctions between the treatments of the story in the two may be best illustrated by placing some of the salient facts in both in juxtaposition as follows:

The Qur'ân	The Old Testament
(1) The Qur'ân says that Ya'qûb's special love for Yûsuf was due to his dream and notion of a great future for his son (12:4-6).	(1) The Old Testament says that Ya'qub's love for Yûsuf was due to his being the son of an old age (Gen. 37:3).
(2) The Qur'ân says that Yûsuf's brothers conspired against him before taking him out with them. (12:9-10).	(2) No mention of it in the Old Testament.
(3) The Qur'ân states that it was Yûsuf's brothers who asked their father to let Yûsuf go with them (12:11-14).	(3) The Old Testament, on the other hand, makes Ya'qûb ask Yûsuf to go out with his brothers (Gen. 37: 13-14).
(4) The Qur'ân shows that Yûsuf did not divulge his dream to his brothers (12:5).	(4) The Old Testament says that Yûsuf told about his dreams to his brothers (Gen. 37: 5,9).
(5) The Qur'ân says that Yûsuf's brothers threw him into a pit wherefrom a passing caravan picked him up and subsequently sold him as a slave in Egypt (12:15,19).	(5) The Old Testament says that Yûsuf's brothers first threw him into a pit and then took him out and sold him to a passing company of merchants (Gen. 23-28).
(6) The Qur'ân says that Ya'qûb did not believe the story given out by his sons nor did he despair of getting him back someday (12:16-18).	(6) The Old Testament says that Ya'qûb readily believed his sons' false story , became despaired of getting Yûsuf back . and mourned his loss for a long time (Gen. 333-34).
7) The Qur'ân states that it was 'Azîz's wife who attempted to seduce Yûsuf and shut the door of her room whereupon Yûsuf ran away from her. She snatched her shirt from behind which was torn as Yûsuf rushed towards the door (12: 23-25).	(7) The Old Testament syas that 'Azîz's wife shouted and called for help whereupon Yûsuf left his clothes in her hands and fled (Gen. 39:12).

[1] Q. 5:19; 5:119.
[2] Q. 4:171; 6:101; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4-5; 19:35; 19:88-89; 19:91-92; 21:26; 23:91; 25:2; 37:152; 39:4; 43:81; 72:3 and 112:3.
[3] Q. 4:171; 5:76.
[4] Q. 4:157.

(8) The Qur'ân says that when in the course of Yûsuf's running away he and 'Azîz's wife were at the door, her husband unexpectedly arrived there. She then hastened to allege that Yûsuf had attempted to violate her honour and without waiting for her husband's opinion demanded that Yûsuf be put in prison or be appropriately punished (12:25).	(8) The Old Testament syas that 'Azîz came back home afterwards when his wife informed him of Yûsuf's alleged offence, saying that as she cried out for help Yûsuf left his clothes to her and fled (Gen. 39:14-18).
(9) The Qur'ân says that Yûsuf defended himself then and there at the door telling the truth that it was she who had attempted to seduce her (12:26).	(9) No mention of it in the Old Testament.
(10) The Qur'ân further says that a witness of the household pointed out that if Yûsuf's shirt was torn in the front he was to blame; but if it was torn in the backside he was guilty (12:26-27).	(10) No mention of it in the Old Testament.
(11) As the shirt was torn in the backside 'Azîz realized the truth of Yûsuf's statement, asked him to pass it over in silence and also asked her to seek Allah's forgiveness for her sinful act (12:28-29)	(11) The Old Testament says that 'Azîz's anger shot up as soon as heard his wife's complaint and instantly put Yûsuf into prison. (Gen. 39:19-20)
(12) Information about the affair nonetheless leaked out and the ladies of the town started whispering among themselves about the deed of'Azîz's wife who invited the ladies to a banquet where at the end of the dinner she gave each lady a knife and asked them to cut the fruits laid before them. At the same time she asked Yûsuf to come out before them. They were so bewitched by the beauty and countenance of Yûsuf that each of them cut her hand with the knife instead of cutting the fruit each was holding. Exultantly 'Azîz's wife confessed before them her deed and insisted that if Yûsuf did not accede to her solicitation he would surely be put in prison and humbled (12:29-32).	(12) No mention of the incident in the Old Testament.

(13) Yûsuf himself preferred going to prison in view of the persistence of 'Azîz's wife in her design. 'Azîz also preferred putting Yûsuf in prison in order to avoid a scandal (12:33-35).	(13) No mention of it in the Old Testament.
(14) The Qur'ân says that when the King of Egypt sent his messenger to the prison conveying his decision to release Yûsuf from imprisonment and to appoint him to a high post, he did not jump at the offer but demanded that the affair which had brought him into prison be first investigated and his innocence publicly vindicated (12:50).	(14) The Old Testament does not refer to Yûsuf's demand for public vindication of his innocence and says that he instantly accepted the king's offer.
(15) The public hearing was duly held and Yûsuf's innocence vindicated by the confession of 'Azîz's wife of her guilt as well as by the testimony of the ladies who had cut their hands in the banquet and before whom also 'Azîz's wife confessed her guilt (12:51-52 &12:32).	(15) No mention of these facts in the Old Testament.
(16) The Qur'ân ends the story by narrating how Yûsuf was finally united with his father and brothers and refers to the whole outcome as a realization of his dream (12:100).	(16) No reference is made in the old Testament to the final realization of Yûsuf's dream.
(17) The Qur'ân correctly describes that Yûsuf's brothers used "beasts of burden " (*ba'îr*), not camel (*jamal/ibil*) to carry their merchandise to Egypt. Camel had not yet been domesticated in Yûsuf's time.	(17) The Old Testament, on the other hand, describes them as camels not only at the time of Yûsuf but also at the time of Ishâq, the grandfather of Yûsuf.
(18) Finally, the Qur'ân rightly describes the Egyptian ruler in this story as "King", not as "Pharaoh", which came to be used as the designation of the Egyptian sovereign much later in the reign of Amenhotep IV, i. e, during the second quarter of the 14th century B.C.	(18) The Old Testament, on the other hand, throughout terms the Egyptian ruler as "Pharaoh" not only in the story of Yûsuf but also with regard to events occurring much earlier during the time of Ibrâhîm.

These are some of the factual differences in the Qur'ânic and Old-Testament accounts of the story of Yûsuf. A detailed comparison would reveal more such differences.

Similarly the fourth passage, 28:44-46, comes at the end of a narration of some of the facts relating to Mûsâ (Moses, 28:2-43). Incidentally, this account of the *fact* starts with the statement: "We recite unto thee some of the *naba'* (story, account) relating to Mûsâ." The Qur'ân indeed tells the story of Mûsâ and his brother Hârûn, as also that of the Israelites in far greater detail than what occurs in the Old-Testament. There are of course some similarities between the two accounts; but the differences and the new elements in the Qur'ân are fundamental[1]. (1) The most important distinction is that the Old-Testament, though it represents Mûsâ as the "Law-giver", nonetheless accuses him and also Hârûn of several improprieties and ultimately depicts them as persons who had betrayed God and incurred His wrath.[2] It is even alleged that Hârûn was instrumental in introducing the worship of the golden calf. The Qur'ân, on the other hand, clears them of such accusations and emphatically asserts that they were Allah's chosen Prophets, were recipients of His favours, revelation and scripture, were free from the irregularities ascribed to them and were men who sincerely and devoutly discharged their duties as Allah's Prophets by calling their people to the worship of the One Only God.[3] (2) It also specifically mentions that it was the Israelite Sâmirî, not Hârûn, who was responsible for introducing the worship of the calf.[4] (3) It is also in the Qur'ân alone that the story of Mûsâ's travel to the "meeting place of the two seas" is given.[5] (5) Again, it is only in the Qur'ân that the significant incident of the Pharaoh's plan to kill Mûsâ is revealed and it is further stated that a "believer" at Pharaoh's court dissuaded him from carrying out his plan.[6]

Even with regard to details, as the writer in the *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* points out, there are a number of differences. Thus (6), in the Qur'ân it is the Pharaoh's wife, not his daughter, who rescues the infant Mûsâ from the river; (7)

[1] See for a summary of the similarities the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1974 reprint, pp. 414-415.

[2] Deuteronomy 32:48-52.

[3] See for instance Q. 2:52-72; 7:144-145; 19:51-53,57-73; 20:39-50; 21:48; 33:69; 37:114-122; 53:38 and 87:19.

[4] Q. 20:85-86; 20:95-97.

[5] Q. 18:60-62. The writer in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (p. 415) rightly says: "The story of Musa's accompanying a wise man on a journey seems without parallel.)

[6] Q. 40:26-45. The writer in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, thinking that some aspects of the story of Mûsâ originated in Haggada, writes, "The Kur'anic story of a believer at the court of Pharaoh who wants to save Mûsâ is not clear." Yes; the comparison which the writer suggests, of course with a question mark, with the story of Jethro in Haggada is really *not clear*. The Qur'ânic account is quite distinctive, without any parallel in Haggada.

instead of the seven shepherdesses in the Bible, it is only two in the Qur'ân whom Mûsâ assists; (8) and instead of ten plagues the Qur'ân speaks of nine miracles; (9) also Mûsâ strikes twelve springs out of the rock, one for each tribe; (10) he repents after having slain the Egyptian and (11) he sees the burning bush at night and desires to take a brand from its fire. (12) The Qur'ân also mentions that the Pharaoh's magicians died for their belief in God.[1] (13) Also its description of the capabilities of the Pharaoh's magicians is different from that of the Bible. The latter ascribes supernatural powers to them but the Qur'ân treats them as mere conjurers. (14) The Bible gives a rather exaggerated figure of the Hebrew population at the time of the Exodus saying that there were 600,000 men, with women and children in addition (Exodus 12:37). "Consequently, in this case", observes Maurice Bucaille, "the entire population would have approximately amounted to two and a half million or more, according to certain Jewish commentators. Such a hypothesis is quite untenable."[2] The Qur'ân, on the other hand, does not give any such figures about the Hebrew population of the time.(15) While the Bible informs us that the Pharaoh was afraid of the increasing Hebrew population and hence ordered the killing of their newly born male babes, the Qur'ân informs us that he was not worried about any such demographic problem and boastfully said: "These indeed are a band of small numbers" (26:54).

Still more significant (16) is the mention of Hâmân in the Qur'ân as an intimate of the Pharaoh (28:6,8, 38; 29:39; 40:24, 36). Hâmân is not mentioned in the Bible and scholars have hitherto been guessing about his identity and the correctness of his association with the Pharaoh. It has been suggested that he is to be identified with the ancient Egyptian god "Amun" or that he might be "Aman", a counsellor of Assueus (Xerexes) who was an enemy of the Jews. But it has now been discovered that Hâmân in the Qur'ân is an exact transliteration of a Hieroglyphic name of a person who was "chief of the workers in stone-quarries" at the time of the Pharaoh and that this description of him fits in with what is spoken of him in the Qur'ân. The name Hâmân has also been found engraved on a stela kept at the Hof-Museum of Vienna, Austria. Hieroglyphs had been totally forgotten at the time of the Qur'ânic revelation and its decipherment took place only in the 19th century. "Since matters stood like that in ancient times", writes the discoverer of this fact, Maurice Bucaille, "the existence of the word 'Hâmân' in the Qur'ân suggests a special reflection."[3]

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[1] *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *op.cit*, 414-415.
[2] Maurice Bucaille, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

But the most astounding fact is that (17) the Qur'ân, while mentioning that the Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned and destroyed, also says that the body of the Pharaoh was saved: "So today We rescue your body that you be for those who come after you a sign! And many of men are about Our signs indeed heedless!" (فاليوم ننجيك ببدنك لتكون لمن خلفك ءاية وان كثيرا من الناس عن ءاياتنا لغافلون - 10:92). The Bible simply says that the Pharaoh was drowned; and early in the 7th century when the above mentioned statement of the Qur'ân was revealed none could have any idea that the body of the Pharaoh had been saved. Modern Egyptology has established the fact that the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Merenptah, successor of Ramesses II. In 1898 the French Egyptologist V. Loret discovered the mummy of Merenptah and his name was found written under the first layer of the wrappings. Medical investigations carried out by Maurice Bucaille on the mummy of Merenptah confirm the Qur'ânic account of his death. "There was no human knowledge, as well, at this time, about the two other Qur'ânic teachings which are not found in the Bible: the name of an intimate person belonging to the close circle of Pharaoh, 'Haman', and the announcement of what happened to the dead body of Pharaoh. What we read in the Qur'ân about them is in close conformity with modern data in the field of Egyptology....... Now, it is up to the exegetes of the Qur'an and the Bible to direct their objective attention to these facts and this reality and draw conclusions."[2]

Similarly with regard to the other Prophets the accounts in the Qur'ân differ fundamentally from those in the Bible. Some of the differences in the story of Ibrâhîm have been mentioned above. So far as Dâ'ud and Sulaymân (Solomon), the two other great Prophets are concerned, the Bible in fact depicts them as tyrants, committing the most heinous crimes, indulging in pleasures and licentiousness and even abducting others' wives for illicit enjoyment![3] Prophet Lûṭ is even made to commit incest with his own daughters.[4] The Qur'ân, on the other hand, is singularly free from imputing such frivolities to any of the Prophets. And so far as Dâ'ud is concerned, he is represented as Allah's ideal servant on whom He bestowed kingdom, wisdom, scripture and power[5]. Similarly Sulaymân was favoured with rare knowledge of the languages of birds and animals, in addition to power and kingdom.[6] Both were noble characters and Allah's Prophets.

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1 Maurice Bucaille, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217, 219.

3 For Dâ'ud see Samuel II, 3:12-16; 4:4-5; 16:23; 18:33; and for Solomon see Kings I, 2:13-25; 28:35; 11:1-13.

4 Gen. 19:31-36.

5 Q. 2:102; 4:163; 6:84; 21:78-82; 27:15-44; 34:12-14; 38:30-40.

Thus a comparison between the Biblical and Qur'ânic accounts of the Prophets makes it clear that the latter are not a reproduction of the former. There are of course points of similarity between the two sets of accounts; but the Qur'ân definitely presents a good deal different and original. Some of the orientalists do recognize that there are new elements in the Qur'ân. In general, however, their treatment of the subject suffers from three common drawbacks. In the first place, they seem to emphasize only the points of similarity almost to the exclusion of the points of dissimilarity or make only casual and secondary reference to them. Second, they spare no pains to identify similar facts or ideas in other ancient Greek, Hebrew and Latin works or legends and then immediately advance the suggestion that the Qur'ânic accounts are drawn from or based on them. It is overlooked that the mere existence of similar facts or ideas in previous works, sometimes thousand of years old, does not *ipso facto* prove that a subsequent work is based on that work. Some further evidence is needed to show the contact or possibility of contact with, or understanding of, that source. This point is especially relevant in the case of Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him; for it does not carry conviction just to suggest that he mastered the materials treasured in numerous ancient works and sources, and that also in a multiplicity of foreign and even defunct languages, by means only of casual conversations with a trader in transit or a foreign slave in domestic service. For, that is the most that has hitherto been alleged about him. Nor is there any indication that Makka and its vicinity at that time possessed a good library or museum containing the ancient works and manuscripts to which the orientalists call their readers' attention; or that there were scholars and philologists in that place to unravel the secrets of such works to the prophet-to-be. Third, while casually recognizing that there are new elements in the Qur'ân, the orientalists seem never to have paid attention to find out the sources of these elements. If they had done so, they would surely have found reason to see that the assumptions under which they have hitherto been labouring so diligently and impressively need revision.

[1] Q. 27:15-30.

CHAPTER III
THE ALLEGED CONTEMPORARY ERRORS IN THE QUR'ÂN AS EVIDENCE OF THE PROPHET'S AUTHORSHIP

The discrepancies and differences between the statements in the Qur'ân on the one hand and those in the Bible on the other in respect of the prophetic stories and other matters clearly militate against the theory of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) having allegedly drawn on and reproduced the Biblical materials. To sustain the theory, therefore, the orientalists have recourse to a two-fold plea, namely, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) did not himself read the Bible but derived his information about Judaism and Christianity from what he heard from others and that since his knowledge was thus only secondary, certain mistaken notions about these two systems prevailing at the time in certain quarters have crept into the Qur'ân. And as an extension of this latter plea it has lately been suggested, mainly by Watt, that not only some mistaken notions about these two systems but also the prevailing mistaken notions about the world and the universe have been reproduced in the Qur'ân.

The utter untenability of the original assumption that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) and for that matter any reasonable person, would have proceeded to challenge the correctness of the two established religious systems on the basis of mere hear-say knowledge or that he would have ventured to formulate and promulgate a new religion on the authority of what his alleged private "informants" or "tutors" prompted to him, has been shown in the previous chapter. The present chapter deals with the remaining aspect of the orientalists' pleas, namely, the supposed mistakes about Judaism and Christianity and the so-called scientific errors in the Qur'ân.

I. THE SUPPOSED MISTAKES ABOUT JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

In dealing with this topic two things need to be borne in mind. In the first place, the Qur'ân does not really treat Judaism and Christianity as independent religions but as deviations from and corruption of the message delivered by Allah's prophets. Hence there was no question of its stating what the modern Jews and Christians think to be the correct articles of their faiths. The Qur'ân is set to pointing out that what the Jews and the Christians believed and practised at the time were errors and that their scriptures had been altered and manipulated to accommodate those errors and incorrect beliefs. It also vigorously attempts to

correct and rectify those errors. Secondly, it should also be borne in mind that what the modern Jews and Christians believe to be the correct doctrines of their faiths are not the same as those believed and practised by their predecessor Jews and Christians of the sixth and the seventh Christian century. Hence it is basically a wrong approach to say that the Qur'ân's description of certain of the beliefs and practices of Judaism and Christianity are "palpably" false. For, it is well-known that a number of "reforms" and modifications have been made in these faiths, particularly in Christianity, since the advent of Islam. The point would be clearer if it is noted that some serious Christian thinkers have lately advocated the abandonment of such doctrines as incarnation and divinity of Jesus ('Îsâ)[1], the concept of the "Holy Ghost" as part of the Trinity,[2] etc. If any of these suggested reformulating of the doctrines of Christianity takes place, a future Christian scholar would as easily be able to say that the statement that "Christ is God incarnate" is a "palpably" false notion about Christianity!

That exactly is what Muir and the others have done. Thus, while unjustly accusing the Qur'ân of having reproduced what they consider mistakes and errors about Judaism and Christianity, they have not been able to avoid recognizing the fact that the alleged notions were those held by the contemporary followers of those faiths. Muir, for instance, places the blame squarely upon the "Catholics" and the Syrian Christians of the time; while Watt follows a cautious course and transfers the blame upon those whom he calls in his earlier work "nominally Christian Arabs".[3] In his latest work he further modifies the innuendo saying: "some people in Mecca wrongly supposed certain beliefs to be held by Jews and Christians" and that "these were beliefs held by the Meccans."[4] It must at once be noted that the beliefs and practices alluded to were not the suppositions of "some people in Mecca", nor were the beliefs held by "the Meccans" as such, but by the Makkan, Arab and Syrian Christians in general and that in pointing out those aspects of their beliefs the Qur'ân was not describing the tenets of Judaism and Christianity but was pointing out how the followers of those faiths had deviated from the original teachings of the Prophets

As regards the specific instances of the alleged mistakes it is said that the Qur'ân suggests that the Trinity "consists of Father, Son and Virgin Mary",[5] that

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[1] See for instanec J. HICKS (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London, 1977.
[2] The protagonists of the Salvation Army advocate this.
[3] WATT, *M. at M.*, 28.
[4] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 2, 44, 55.
[5] WATT, *M. at M.*, 28.

it asserts that the Jews regarded Ezra ('Uzayr) as son of God and that it denies that Jesus was crucified.

(a) *Regarding the Trinity*

It is to be noted that the Qur'ân does nowhere state that the Trinity consists of "Father", "Son" and "Virgin Mary". Indeed it was none of the Qur'ân's business to identify the entities or "Persons" that constituted the Trinity. It simply denounces the concept as antithetical to and subversive of true monotheism. It is the orientalists', more particularly Watt's own supposition that the Qur'ânic passage which refers to the Christians' worship of Maryam and 'Îsâ, besides Allah, "suggests that the Trinity consists", etc. In fact Watt modifies his statement in his latest work where he refers to the Qur'ânic statement somewhat more accurately, saying that it gives the idea that "Christians took Jesus and Mary to be 'two gods apart from God'".[1] The passage (5:116) in question runs as follows:

و اذ قال الله يا عيسى ابن مريم ء أنت قلت للناس اتخذونى و أمى الهين من دون الله قال سبحانك ما يكون لى أن أقول ما ليس لى بحق.....

"And when Allah will say: O 'Îsâ, son of Maryam, did you say to men: Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? He will say: Glory be to you; it was not for me to say what I had no right to say....." (5:116)[2]

Here the Qur'ân simply disapproves the worship of 'Îsâ and Maryam, besides Allah, and also exonerates 'Îsâ from having so advised his followers. There is no allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity here. Significantly enough, where the Qur'ân alludes to the concept of the Trinity, as in 4:171 and 5:73, it does not identify the entities that are supposed to constitute the Trinity. In fact the Qur'ân treats the two subjects, the Trinity and the worship of human beings as gods or lords, as two distinct themes. This is very clear from 9:31 which disapproves the Christians' and the Jews' taking their monks and ascetics as "lords" apart from Allah. The passage runs as follows:

اتخذوا أحبارهم و رهبانهم أربابا من دون الله والمسيح ابن مريم و ما أمروا الا ليعبدوا الها واحدا لا اله الا هو سبحانه عما يشركون.

"They take their priests and anchorites as lords apart from Allah, and (also) the Messiah, son of Maryam. Yet they were not commanded but to worship One God. There is no god but He. Exalted is He from what they associate (with Him)." (9:31)

This passage is analogous to 5:116. Here again the worship of any other beings besides Allah is condemned. There is a tradition which explains how the

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 2, 45.

2 Muḥammad 'Alî's translation with slight modification.

Christians and the Jews treated their priests and monks as lords.[1] But apart from that question, no one would say on the basis of this passage (9:31) that the Qur'ân conceives of the Trinity to have been composed of the priests and monks as one element, 'Îsâ as another and Allah as the third!

That 'Îsâ is taken for god by the Christians is an admitted fact. As regards the question of the worship of Maryam, it is a proven fact that not only the Christians of Arabia, but also many of them in the East and the West, particularly the Catholics, did and still do worship or adore her as possessing divine dignity. Watt ignores this fact presumably because it does not form part of the Protestant dogma. The point is ably explained by Muḥammad 'Alî who, in his note to the *'âyah* in question writes as follows:

"From the description of Mary being taken for god by the Christians, some Christian critics of the Qur'ân conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity according to the Qur'ân consists of three persons – God, Jesus and Mary. But this is an absolutely unwarranted conclusion. Mary is no doubt spoken of as being taken for an object of worship by the Christians; but the doctrine of the Trinity is not mentioned here, while the divinity of Mary is not mentioned where the Trinity is spoken of. The doctrine and practice of Mariolatry, as it is called by Protestant controversialists, is too well known. In the catechism of the Roman Church the following doctrines are to be found: 'That she is truly the mother of God, and the second Eve, by whose means we have received blessing and life; that she is the mother of Pity and very specially our advocate; that her images are of the utmost utility.' (Ency. Br., 11th ed. vol. 17, p. 813). It is also stated that her intercessions are directly appealed to in the Litany. And further, that there were certain women in Thrace, Scythia, and Arabia who were in the habit of worshipping the virgin as the goddess, the offer of a cake being one of the features of their worship. 'From the time of the council of Ephesus (held in 431)', says the same writer, 'to exhibit figures of the virgin and child became the approved expression of orthodoxy.... Of the growth of the Marian cults, alike in the east and in the west, after the decision at Ephesus it would be impossible to trace the history.... Justinian in one of his laws bespeaks her advocacy for the Empire, and he inscribes the high altar in the new church of St. Sophia with her name. Narses looks to her directions on the field of battle. The Emperor Heracleus bears her image on his banner. John of Damascus speaks of her as the Sovereign lady to whom the whole creation has been made subject by her son. Peter Damain recognizes her as the most exalted of all creatures and apostrophizes her as deified and endowed with all power in heaven and in earth, yet not forgetful of our race.' The Christian world had in fact felt 'the need for a mediator to deal with the very mediator', and thus Mary was raised to the throne of Divinity along with Jesus. The recent proclamation of the Pope relating to the bodily assumption of Mary supports this conclusion, and will raise a new question for the Christian world whether Trinity really consists of God, Jesus and Mary."[2]

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[1] See for instance AL-ṬABARÎ, *Tafsîr*, XIV,209,211; IBN KATHÎR, *Tafsîr*, IV,77 and *Tirmidhî* (ed. AHMAD MUḤAMMAD SHÂKIR), V, 278 (*ḥadîth* 3095).

[2] MUḤAMMAD 'ALI, *The Holy Qur'ân Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary*, revised edition, Lahore, 1985, pp. 275-276,note 751.

(b) *Regarding 'Uzayr*

As regards the Qur'ânic statement about the Jews' taking 'Uzayr as son of God (9:30) Watt castigates it as the "chief error in the Qur'ân in respect of Judaism" and asserts that "while it is true that the Old Testament uses the term 'son of God' for the Messiah who was expected, there is no evidence that it was ever applied to Ezra."[1]

Of course there is no evidence in the extant Old Testament about it; but the Qur'ân was not referring to what is written in the Old Testament about 'Uzayr but to the belief and assertion of some of the Jews of the time who regarded 'Uzayr as the son of God. In fact the *'âyah* in question, 9:30, starts with the expression: "And the Jews say" (و قالت اليهود). The commentator Al-Bayḍâwî, to whom Watt refers a number of times in his book,[2] makes it clear with reference to this *'âyah* that because the Old Testament was given its present form by 'Uzayr, many of the Jews of the time considered him a "son of God" and that specially at Madina there was a group of Jews who held that belief. Al-Bayḍâwî further points out that the *'âyah* in question was read out and recited as usual but no Madinan Jew came forward with a contradiction[3]. It is to be noted that this *'âyah* is unanimously regarded as Madinan. Hence the silence of the Jews of the place on the matter is suggestive enough, particularly as they were avowed critics of the Prophet.

Not only Al-Bayḍâwî but also other commentators mention that the *'âyah* refers to the views of a particular group of the Jews. For instance, Al-Ṭabarî gives a number of reports together with their chains of narrators specifically mentioning the leading Jews of Madina who considered 'Uzayr a son of God. The most prominent of those Jews were Finḥâṣ, Sullâm ibn Mishkam, Nu'mân ibn Awfâ, Sha's ibn Qays and Mâlik ibn al-Ṣayf.[4] Similarly Al-Qurṭubî mentions the same fact and the same names adding that the expression "the Jews" occurring at the beginning of the *'âyah* means "some particular Jews", just as the expression "people told them" (*qâla lahum al-nâs*) means not all the people of the world but some particular people. He further says that the Jewish sect who held that 'Uzayr was God's son had become extinct by his (Al-Qurṭubî's) time. [5]

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 45.
2 *Ibid*, 108, note 2 to Chapter 1 and notes 2 and 10 to Chapter III.
3 AL-BAYḌÂWÎ, *Tafsîr*, I, second Egyptian impression, 1968, p. 412.
4 AL-ṬABARÎ, *Tafsîr*, XIV, 201-204.
5 AL-QURṬUBÎ, *Tafsîr*, Pt.VIII, 116-117.

Thus, in respect of neither Maryam nor 'Uzayr is the Qur'ânic statement an error or mistake. Nor could it be said that the Qur'ân was reproducing the popular and prevailing errors and thus inveighing unjustly against Judaism and Christianity; for it refers to those beliefs as "errors" and points out the mistake in adhering to them. Hence if they did not really form part of the pristine religion of the Jews and the Christians, the Qur'ân was only emphasizing the truth.

Nor does the Qur'ân stop at pointing out those errors alone. It points out other errors too. Thus, (a) as against the Jews' insinuations and innuendo against Maryam it unequivocally asserts her chastity and purity of character. (b) As against the doctrine of the Trinity it uncompromisingly asserts the absolute and immutable unity of God. (c) As against the Jews' and Christians' notion of sonship of God it emphatically states that God does not have any "son" nor is He "Father" to anyone as such. (d) As against the divinity of Jesus ('Îsâ) it insists on his humanity and asserts that those who worship him as god are "unbelievers". Interestingly enough, none of the orientalists has hitherto ventured to suggest that these Qur'ânic references to the prevailing beliefs of the Jews and Christians are also "palpable" mistakes in the Qur'ân due to its having adopted those "erroneous" notions from "nominally Christian Arabs", or "some people in Mecca", or "the Meccans"! The fact is that the Qur'ân refers to these latter beliefs of the Jews and the Christians that prevailed at the time as well as to the other prevailing beliefs and practices regarding Maryam and 'Uzayr and disapproves of each and every item of them. The modern followers of the two religions have abandoned some of the old beliefs and practices and, on the basis of their reorientation, some of them now come forward with the suggestion that the Qur'ânic references to some of the beliefs and practices of Judaism and Christianity are palpable mistakes and that therefore Muḥammad (p.b.h.) did not himself read the Bible but gathered his information from hearsay. The point at issue, however, is not whether he himself read the Bible or did not read it. The issue is that the Qur'ân, and therefore Muḥammad (p.b.h.), denounce as errors the prevailing beliefs and practices of the Jews and Christians, including even those that are said to have been sanctioned by their holy scripture. Not only that. The Qur'ân asserts that the extant Judaeo-Christian scripture is a corruption and modification of the original text.[1] Clearly, the source of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.)

[1] See for a recent western scholar's recognition of this fact, BART D. EHRMAN, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture. The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1993.

knowledge and conviction must have been something other than either a direct or an indirect acquaintance with the contents of the Bible.

(c) *Regarding Crucifixion*

Similarly in its reference to the end of 'Îsâ's career the Qur'ân does in no way reproduce a popular "mistake". On the contrary, it asserts that the popular saying (*qawluhum*) about it is a mistake. The *'âyah* (4:157) which refers to the matter runs as follows:

و قولهم انا قتلنا المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله و ما قتلوه و ما صلبوه ولكن شبه لهم وان الذين اختلفوا فيه لفي شك منه ما لهم به من علم الا اتباع الظن و ما قتلوه يقينا.

"And as for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, son of Maryam, the Messenger of Allah; but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it except the pursuit of conjecture; and they killed him not for certain." (4:157)

Clearly, the passage sets out to contradict *their saying*, i.e., the saying of the Jews; for the whole narration here is about the Jews. The contradiction is made in a very positive manner. It is stated that they did not kill him nor did they really crucify him. It is further stated that they, while claiming to have killed 'Îsâ, entertained doubts about it. The allusion is here to their doubts about the identity of the individual they put on the cross.[1] The passage then says that it was made to appear like that to them (*shubbiha lahum*), i.e., 'Îsâ's having been crucified and killed in that manner was an incorrect impression or illusion to them and that they had no real knowledge of what actually happened but followed only a certain conjecture. The passage ends with an emphatic reiteration that "they killed him not for certain."

It may be noted that even some early Christian sects did not believe that 'Îsâ died on the cross. Thus the Basilidans thought that some one else was substituted for him on the cross. The *Gospel of St. Barnabas* supports the theory of substitution on the cross. Another view, that of the Diocetae, says that Jesus ('Îsâ) had never a real physical or natural body, but only an apparent or phantom one, and that his crucifixion was only apparent, not real. A yet another view, that of the Marcionite Gospel, says that Jesus was not even born but merely appeared in human form.

It cannot be said that in denying 'Îsâ's crucifixion and death on the cross the Qur'ân adopts the view of any of the above mentioned Christian sects; for it categorically rejects the very basis of those views, namely, the divinity of 'Îsâ and

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[1] See for instance AL-ṬABARÎ, *Tafsîr*, Pt.VI, 16-17.

the theory of his phantom body. Rather, in view of the doubts and differences prevailing over the matter, it categorically asserts the truth and positively contradicts the Jews' assertion that they had killed him. The position is quite different from that of mere reproduction of a prevailing erroneous view. In fact, the Qur'ânic statement is directed against the Jews as well as the Christians. It contradicts the former's assertion that they had killed 'Îsâ and that therefore he was not a Prophet because he suffered what is called an "accursed death". Similarly, it rejects the Christian doctrine of the divinity of 'Îsâ and that of "vicarious atonement" and its basis, the concept of "blood sacrifice".

The Qur'ânic statement that "they killed him not for certain" finds support even in the Bible itself. Thus:

(1) Jesus had prayed to God the night before his arrest to be saved from the accursed death on the cross (Mark 14:36; Matt. 26:39; Luke 22:44) and that his prayer was heard, i.e., responded to. This means that he did not intend to die and that God did not allow his being subjected to the accursed death.

(2) There is nothing in the Gospels which may be taken to be an eye-witness account that the person crucified was dead when he was taken down from the cross or when he was placed in the sepulchre specially made for him.

(3) Pilate, who was in charge of the trial, appears to have grown sceptical about the justice of the whole proceedings and to have taken care to enable Jesus to escape death on the cross. The trial took place on Friday. Pilate purposely prolonged it and delivered judgement only three hours before sun-set, thus ensuring that Jesus could not be kept on the cross for more than a couple of hours at the most. For, with the sun-set the Sabbath day would ensue and the condemned persons would have to be brought down from the crosses. Pilate also took additional care to see that Jesus was given wine and vinegar mingled with myrrh to render him less sensitive to pain. Thus Jesus remained on the cross for not more than three hours (Mark 15:25; John 19:14). This was evidently too short a time for any person of normal constitution to die on a cross. Significantly enough, the two other persons who were crucified simultaneously are stated to have been alive when they were brought down from their crosses. Pilate himself did not believe that Jesus died in so short a time (Mark 15:44).

(4) After being taken down from the cross the two other persons' legs were crushed, but this measure was dispensed with, according to the Bible, in the case of Jesus (John 19:32,33).

(5) Jesus, after being brought down from the cross, was pierced in the side of his body and blood rushed out of it (John 19:34), which shows that he was still alive.

(6) Pilate readily granted Joseph of Arimaethia's request and handed over Jesus' "body" to him. He lavished care on Jesus and put him in a special tomb hewn in the side of a rock (Mark 15:46); which was evidently a manoeuvre to deceive Jesus' enemies.

(7) On the third day the stone on the tomb's opening was found to have been removed (Mark 16:4), which proves that it had been removed previously, probably on the first or second day of the internment.

(8) Mary Magdalene, when she looked into the sepulchre, did not find Jesus there. She saw him standing and at first supposed "him to be the gardener". Then, "17. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father, and Your Father; and to my God, and your God. 18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things unto her. 19. Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. 20. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." (John 20:14-15, 17-20)

(9) It was in the same body of flesh that the disciples saw Jesus, his wounds still deep enough for a man to thrust his hand in. (John 20:25-28)

(10) He was seen in the same flesh and bone. He still felt hunger and ate food as his disciples did. "36. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. 37. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. 38. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39. Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. 40. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them *his* hands and *his* feet. 41. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? 42. And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honey-comb. 43. And he took it, and did eat before them." (Luke 24:36-43)

(11) Jesus undertook a journey to Galilee where, his disciples saw him.(Matt. 28:10-17)

All these statements in the different Gospels strongly support the Qur'ânic verdict: "they killed him not for certain." Indeed the above mentioned Gospel statements clearly suggest that Jesus escaped death on the cross and therefore avoided being discovered by his enemies.

It is worth noting in this connection that recent research confirms that Jesus did not suffer death on the cross. Thus Barbara Thiering, an Australian scholar, has demonstrated convincingly, on a meticulous analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls, that Jesus did not die on the cross[1]. Almost simultaneously, two European scholars, Holger Kersten and Elmar E. Gruber, have assiduously pursued the story of the radio-carbon test carried out some years ago on the famous "Turin Shroud"[2] and have shown that Jesus did not die on the cross.[3] The end of Jesus is indeed a difficult historical and theological question; and it would not just be appropriate to cut it short, as Watt does,[4] by calling the Qur'ânic statement on it a popular error picked up from the bazaar gossips of Makka or Bosra.

II. THE ALLEGED SCIENTIFIC ERRORS

As an extension of the plea about errors in respect of Judaism and Christianity Watt has lately suggested that the Qur'ân also reproduces the contemporary errors about the nature of the earth and the sky. The Qur'ân, he says, addresses its first audience, the Arabs, in terms of their own world-picture and thus reproduces even points in which that picture was mistaken. In support of this statement he reproduces, in translation, some eight Qur'ânic passages and says that they show that the prevailing notions of the earth being a flat space and the sky being a solid structure, "presumably of stone", are reproduced in the Qur'ân.[5] Watt recognizes that different words are used in these passages to describe the earth and says that "all would be interpreted by the hearers in terms of their belief that the earth is flat." He adds that "there is no special emphasis on flatness, since no one supposed that the earth would be otherwise."[6] He also suggests that such reproduction of contemporary errors was only natural, for, according to him, "it was not essential for god's purpose that false ideas of this sort should be

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[1] BARBARA THIERNIG, *Jesus the Man* (first published 1993), Corgi edition, 1993. See especially the back-cover page.

[2] The shroud discovered at Turin and believed to be the garment with which Jesus was covered when placed in the sepulchre.

[3] HOLGER KERSTEN & ELMAR R. GRUBER, *The Jesus Conspiracy The Turin Shroud and the Truth about the Resurrection*, Element Books Ltd., Shaftesbury, 1994.

[4] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 45-46.

[5] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

[6] *Ibid.*, 5.

corrected", "since the Qur'ânic message could be communicated to them [the Arabs] without correcting these beliefs."[1]

Before proceeding to take into account the passages cited by Watt in support of his assumption it is necessary to note the implications of his last mentioned statement about the supposed compatibility of God's purpose with the continuance of the prevailing scientific errors in the Qur'ân. In making this statement Watt appears to reflect the modern Christian's attitude to his own sacred scripture. This attitude is an outcome of a growing awareness since the nineteenth century of the existence of a number of scientific inaccuracies in the Biblical texts. In view of these inaccuracies the opinion first gained ground that there was an antagonism between science and religion. Gradually, however, the notion of a text of revelation communicated by God gave way to the notion of a text "inspired" by God but written down by human hands. The Biblical authors, it came to be assumed, might have introduced inaccuracies to the text arising from the language of the day or from ideas and traditions still honoured and prevalent at the time; but that did not detract from their being divinely inspired.[2] "The scientific errors in the Bible", states an eminent modern Christian thinker, "are the errors of mankind, for long ago man was like a child, as yet ignorant of science."[3]

The modern Muslim, however, is neither in need of nor prepared for finding solace in such assumptions; for there is no discrepancy between scientific data and any of the Qur'ânic statements. As will be seen presently, the interpretations put by Watt on the passages he cites are wrong. And it is surprising that in advancing his assumption he has not taken into account, not to speak of a umber of Arabic works on the subject,[4] even such a best-seller in Europe as M. Bucaille's *La Bible, Le Coran et la Science* which, appearing for the first time in 1976, had run into 12 editions within ten years[5] and had been translated into at least three other European languages including English and seven Asian languages before Watt penned his above mentioned statement.

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1 *Ibid.*, 2, 44.

2 The second Vatican Council (1962-1965) adopted a document which recognizes that the Books of the Old Testament contain material that is imperfect and obsolete. See M. Bucaille, *What is the Oriigin of Man? The Answers of Science and the Holy Scriptures*, 4th edition, Seghers, Paris, 1988, p. 15.

3 Jean Guitton (1987), quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

4 For instance Muhammad Wafâ al-'Âmirî, *Al-'Ishârât al-'Ilmiyyah Fî al-Qur'ân*, second impression, Cairo, 1401 (1981) and Ḥanafî Aḥmad, *Al-Tafsîr al-'Ilmî li 'Âyât al-Kawniyyah Fî al-Qur'ân*, Cairo, n.d.

5 The 13th edition was published in Paris in 1987.

The word *'arḍ* occurs in the Qur'ân some 461 times. Most of the uses are in connection with a description of Allah's absolute dominion over the entire universe and His power of creation. At a number of places the word clearly comes in the sense of country or dominion;[1] while at other places it is used metaphorically to denote worldly life.[2] The passages wherein it occurs with any description of its shape and nature may be divided into two categories. In one category it is mentioned in combination with or in comparison to the mountains and rivers. Here the emphasis is on how the earth has been made suitable and useful for man and other creatures. Here the listeners' or readers' attention is drawn mainly to the objects of nature and the land-surface falling within his immediate view. In other words, the *earth* in these passages means the land or land-surface falling within an observer's immediate view, in contradistinction to the mountains and rivers, rather than the entire earth as a unit. In the second category of passages the word occurs in relation to the sun, the moon, the skies and the universe in general. Here the *earth* is spoken of as a unit and the description really gives an insight into its shape, position and even movement in space.

In view of this general nature of the Qur'ânic use of the expression *'arḍ* Watt's statement of the subject is partial and faulty in three main respects. In the first place, he concentrates on the passages of the first category and takes them to refer to the shape of the earth as a unit, which is not the case. Second, despite the diversity and differences in the descriptive expressions in the passages he cites he imposes on them all identical meanings because, as he says, the "first audience" of the Qur'ân could not have supposed that the earth's shape could have been otherwise than flat. A really objective approach would have suggested greater care in understanding the precise implications of the different expressions employed in the passages. Watt even neglects to note the significance of a passage in its entirety, omitting its material part from his translation. Third and more importantly, he does not at all take into consideration the second category of passages wherein the shape and position of the earth as a unit, as also those of the others planets and stars in the space, are indicated and which contain astounding scientific data not known to man at the time the Qur'ân was revealed.

That the term *'arḍ* used in most of the passages cited means the land-surface falling within the observer's immediate view, rather than the earth as a planet, is

[1] For instance in 7:110; 14:13; 20:57; 20:63; 26:35; 28:57. Incidentally the word 'earth' seems to be an adaptation of *'ard.*

[2] As in 9:38.

very clear from 88:19-20 and 78:6-7 which Watt cites. The two passages, together with Watt's translations, run respectively as follows:

و الى الجبال كيف نصبت و الى الأرض كيف سطحت

"and [to] the mountains how they are set up? and [to] the earth how it is spread out?" (88:19-20)

ألم نجعل الأرض مهادا والجبال أوتادا

"Did we not make the earth an expanse and the mountains pegs?" (78:6-7)

Clearly, at both the places *'arḍ* means the immediately visible plain land in contradistinction to "the mountains" that also are visible. For, if the earth as a whole is implied, the reference to the mountains distinct from it would be both incongruous and superfluous here. It is further noteworthy that the *'âyah* 78:7 speaks of mountains as "pegs". Modern scientific knowledge confirms that mountains, like pegs have deep roots embedded in the ground and that these stabilize the earth's crust.[1] In another place the Qur'ân very clearly says that Allah "has set firm mountains in the earth so that it would not shake with you."[2] The *'âyahs* 88:6-7 and 78:6-7 do in fact refer to these scientific facts and how Allah has set the earth's surface and the mountains for making the earth suitable for human habitation. They do not speak about the earth's shape. Watt has simply misunderstood and misinterpreted the *'âyahs*.

Let us now consider the material words in relation to *'arḍ* in all the passages cited. They are mentioned below together with Watt's rendering of material words (italicized) in them.

(1) 79:30 = والأرض بعد ذلك دحاها (*daḥâhâ*) "spread out".
(2) 88:20 = و الى الأرض كيف سطحت (*suṭiḥat*) "spread out".
(3) 78:6 = ألم نجعل الأرض مهادا (*mihâdâ*) "make an expanse".
(4) 51:48 = والأرض فرشناها (*farashnâhâ*) "laid flat".
(5) 71:19 = والله جعل لكم الأرض بساطا (*bisâtâ*) "made an expanse".
(6) 20:53 = الذى جعل لكم الأرض مهدا (*mahdâ*) "made a bed".
(7) 13:3 = و هو الذى مد الأرض (*madda*) "spread out".
(8) 2:22 = الذى جعل لكم الأرض فراشا (*fiarâshâ*) "made a carpet".

Needless to say, each one of these expressions like *daḥâhâ*, *suṭiḥat*, etc., admits of a variety of meanings. Watt himself admits this fact in a general way not only with reference to these passages but also with regard to the others he has quoted

[1] See for instance André Cailleux, *Anatomy of the earth*, London, 1968, p. 220; Frank Press and Raymond Siever, *Earth*, Sanfrancisco, 1982, p. 413.
[2] Q. 16:15.

by saying at the outset of his work that he has so selected the translation as "best brings out the points being illustrated by the quotations."[1]

Now, the very first expression in the series, *daḥâhâ*, is noticeably distinctive and different in genre from the rest. Watt, following many other previous translators, renders it as "spread out". But the exact and correct meaning of the term, keeping in view its root, rather provides a very positive Qur'ânic evidence in support of the spherical shape of the earth. For *daḥâ* means to "shape like an egg", its noun being *dahiyah*, which the Arabs still use to mean an egg.[2]

The second expression, *suṭiḥat*, is equally significant. It is derived from *saṭḥ* (سطح) which means surface, outer layer, outer cover, roof, deck, plane, etc. Hence *saṭḥ al-baḥr* means sea-level, *saṭḥ mâ'il* means inclined plane, *saṭḥî* means external, outward, superficial, etc. Keeping this original meaning of the root-word in view and approaching the Qur'ânic statement at 88:20 with our modern knowledge that the interior of the earth is full of gaseous and liquid materials (lava) and that the land-surface is only an outer cover resembling the skin of an egg, and that it is also a plane, it would be seen how very appropriate, scientific and significant is the term *suṭiḥat* used here in describing the land-surface of the earth, particularly after the description in the previous *'âyah*, 88:19, of how the mountains have been affixed. The Qur'ânic statement at 88:20 may thus be very appropriately and more correctly rendered as: "(Do they not look) to the earth how it has been surfaced and planed?"

The third word in the series is *mihâd* and it may be considered along with the sixth in the series, *mahd* in 20:53, because they both belong to the same root. The former means resting place, abode, bosom, cradle and, figuratively, fold (in which something rests). And A.J. Arberry has very correctly translated the expression at 78:6 as: "Have We not made the earth as a cradle?"[3] In fact, this very word *mihâd* occurs at six other places in the Qur'ân,[4] and at each of these places it clearly bears the meaning of an abode, a habitat, a resting place, etc. In any case, even without regard to what we know of the interior of the earth, to translate the expression as "made an expanse" would be quite remote from the original sense and would be inappropriate here.

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*,2.

2 M. FATHÎ 'UTHMÂN, "*Al-'arḍ Fî al-Qur'ân al-Karâm*", *Proceedings of the First Islamic Geographical Conference*", Riyadh, 1404/1984, Vol. IV, 127; A.M. SOLIMAN, *Scientific Trends in teh Qur'ân*, London (Ta-Ha Publications), 1985, p.16.

3 A.J. ARBERRY, *op.cit*, 626.

4 Q. 2:206; 3:12; 3:197; 7:41; 13:18 and 38:56.

Similarly *mahd* means bed or cradle. It occurs at four other places in the Qur'ân, once in connection with *'arḍ* in 43:10 and thrice in connection with 'Îsâ's speaking to men even while in the cradle.[1] And again, A.J. Arberry very consistently renders the term at both 43:10 and 20:53 as cradle. In fact, he translates the statements at both the places uniformly as: "He who appointed the earth to be a cradle for you."[2] Watt, on the other hand, is not so consistent. He translates the expression at 78:6 as "make an expanse" and at 20:53 as "made a bed".

Similarly inconsistent is his translation of the fourth and eighth terms in the series, *farashnâhâ* and *firâshâ*. The primary meaning of *farasha* is to spread out as a bed, to pave, to cover, etc.; while *firâsh* means bed, mattress, bedspread, cushion, carpet, etc. Nevertheless, while Watt has translated this last expression at 2:22 as "made a bed", he has rendered the word at 51:48 as "laid flat", though the farthest manoeuvring that could legitimately be done here is to render it as "spread out as a bed" or "laid out as a bed", but not quite as "laid flat".

There remain two other words to consider, *bisâṭ* and *madda*, the fifth and seventh respectively in the series. The same meaning of laying or spreading as a bed is appropriate for *bisâṭ*; and Arberry has indeed translated the whole statement at 71:9 as: "And God has laid the earth for you as a carpet."[3] Watt, however, has rendered the expression as "made an expanse". As regards the word *madda*, its primary meaning is "he extended" or "he expanded". It may even mean "he spread out", as Watt translates it. The term has been used in the Qur'ân in several other senses. At 84:3-4 the expression is in its passive form, *muddat*, and it clearly bears the meaning of "is flattened"—"And when the earth shall be flattened and it will throw off what is in it and shall get emptied" (و اذا الأرض مدت و ألقت ما فيها و تخلت). This is a description of what will happen when the earth (world) will be brought to an end and the resurrection will take place. Hence the sense in which *muddat* is used here cannot be applied to the same term or its derivatives which speak about the normal situations of the earth and which therefore must bear a meaning other than "made flat" or "flattened". Conversely, this passage is a pointer to the fact that prior to the event of the earth's being brought to an end it is as a whole *not flat*.

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[1] Q. 3:40; 3:110 and 19:314.
[2] A.J. ARBERRY, *op.cit.*, 505 and 314.
[3] *Ibid.*, 609.

Leaving aside the differentials in meanings and accepting the renderings as "spread out", "made an expanse", etc., none of the eight statements cited does really say that the earth as a whole is a flat space; for the passages speak of the earth or land as it comes within the immediate view of the observer. Moreover, though the sense of making level or plane may be said to be common to all the terms, this sense does not in fact run counter to the spherical nature of the earth as a whole. The accepted geometrical and mathematical definition of "plane" is "surface such as that the straight line joining any points on it is touching on all points."[1] Hence, in spite of the earth as a whole being spherical, its surface is nonetheless level, plane, spread out or even flat.

The inherent relativity of the expression *madda* or "spread out" applied to earth in such passages was indeed pointed out some eight centuries ago by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî (544-606 H./1150-1210 A.C.) who was quite conscious of the spherical nature of the earth. Referring to the term *madda* used at 13:3 and 15:19 he makes two points. He says that the object of these passages is to bring home the theme of the existence of the Creator. The reference has therefore to be to such objects as are visible and obvious to the listener. Hence the term *'arḍ* in these passages has to be understood in the sense of the part of it which comes to the immediate view of the observer.[2] Second, he points out that the earth "is an extremely large ball; but a part of a gigantic ball, when looked at it, you will see it as a plain surface. This being the case, the difficulty of which you speak ceases to exist. The proof of this [explanation] is the saying of Allah: (We have set the mountains as pegs (والجبال أوتادا – 78:7). He calls them pegs notwithstanding the fact that there may be extensive plain surfaces on top of them. So is the case here."[3]

Far from reproducing or reflecting the erroneous world-view prevailing in seventh century Arabia the Qur'ân indeed goes far beyond the scientific knowledge of the time and speaks of scientific facts and truths that have only recently been discovered by man. In fact, if Watt had looked carefully enough he would have seen that at least in three of the passages he has cited to support of his assumption there are such extraordinary facts as well as significant pointers to the spherical nature of the earth. Unfortunately, while quoting these passages in

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1 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 19th impression, 1984, p. 636.

2 *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr*, XIX, 3.

3 *Ibid.*, 170. The Arabic text runs as follows.

فهى كرة في غاية العظمة و الكرة العظيمة يكون كل قطعة منها اذا نظرت اليها فانها ترى كالسطح المستوىو اذا كان كذلك زال ما ذكروه من الاشكال والدليل عليه قوله
تعالى (والجبال أوتادا) سماهاأوتادا مع أنه قد يحصل عليها سطوح عظيمة مستوية فكذلك هنا

translation he has omitted in two of these three passages those very portions that contain such facts. One of these passages is 13:3 which in its entirety runs as follows:

و هو الذى مد الأرض و جعل فيها رواسي و أنهارا و من كل الثمرات جعل فيها زوجين اثنين يغشي الليل النهار ان في ذلك لآيات لقوم يتفكرون

"And He it is Who spread the earth, and made in it firm mountains and rivers. And of all fruits He has made pairs of two (of every kind). He makes the night cover the day. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect." (Muhammad Ali's translation with slight modification)

In this passage there are two significant statements. The first is: "And of all fruits He has made pairs of two (of every kind)". The implication of this statement has become clear only in modern times with the discovery of sexes in plants and fruits, indeed of pairs in every thing.[1] In fact the statement has long been translated in that sense.[2] Needless to say that no one in the seventh Christian century did have any inkling of the concept of pairs or sexes in plants, fruits and other things; nor was it possible to comprehend the full significance of this Qur'ânic statement before the scientific discoveries of modern times in this respect.

The second significant statement in the passage (13:3) is: "He makes the night cover the day." Unmistakably, the sense here is that of the night gradually taking the place of the day – a phenomenon which is understandable only with reference to the spherical shape of the earth and its rotation;[3] for, if it was uttered in the context of a flat earth, the statement would have been framed to convey the sense of the day and night alternating each other, not "covering the day with the night", as indeed Arberry translates the clause.[4]

The second passage is 20:53 which runs as follows:

الذى جعل لكم الأرض مهدا و سلك لكم فيها سبلا وأنزل من السماء ماء فأخرجنا به أزواجا من نبات شتى

"He Who made the earth a cradle for you and threaded for you in it routes; and sent down from the sky water. Thus We have produced thereby pairs of plants, each different from the other."(20:53)

The scientific truth about sexes in plants is stated here more pointedly and explicitly, thus supplementing the information contained in 13:3 noted above.

The third of the passages is 51:47-48. It runs as follows:

والسماء بنيناها بأيد و انا لموسعون والأرض فرشناها فنعم الماهدون

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[1] See also Q. 36:36 and 51:49 on this point.

[2] See for instance M. Pickthall's and A. Yusuf Ali's translations and comments on this *'âyah*.

[3] See below (text) for other Qur'ânic references on this point.

[4] Arberry, *op.cit.*, 239.

"And the sky We have made it with Hands; and verily We are Expanders (are in the process of expanding it). And the earth, We have laid it out, and how Excellent are the authors of laying out!"

Here the expression "and verily We are Expanders" (و انا لموسعون) is very significant. Watt has rendered this part of the statement as: "and it is we who make it of vast extent."[1] But it is to be noted that the construction is in the nominal form (جملة اسمية) in contrast with the verbal (جملة فعلية) form of the immediately preceding expression, which is also in the past tense. It is a well-known rule of Arabic construction that the nominal form together with the emphatic *lâm* is used to indicate a habitual or continual act or process of doing. Thus the correct translation of the expression would be: "And verily We are expanders" or "We do expand" or "We are in the process of expanding it". Indeed, A.J. Arberry is just correct in rendering this part of the statement as "and We expand it wide."[2]

Now, this statement assumes a great significance in the light of modern scientific information that the universe is expanding at a staggering speed. It says that everything in space (the skies) – the constellations together with their planets and satellites, etc., are all flying straight ahead at an unimaginable speed. The sun itself, together with its planets and their satellites as a whole are reckoned to be moving at the staggering speed of almost a million miles a day towards the constellation Lyra which itself is moving away at a similar speed! Thus the space, i.e. the sky, is continually expanding. In the light of this modern knowledge the Qur'ânic statement "We have created the heaven, and indeed We do expand it" assumes a bewildering significance, besides being surprisingly precise.

Thus three of the eight passages cited by Watt to prove what he supposes to be scientific errors in the Qur'ân contain at least four such facts as run directly counter to his assumption. Two of these facts relate to the shape of the earth and two relate to creation and the universe in general. These facts are: (a) that Allah has shaped the earth like an egg (*daḥâhâ*); (b) that "He makes the night cover the day" (13:3), which is an indication of the spherical nature of the earth; (c) that plants and fruits, besides other objects, are created in pairs (of sexes) and (d) that the sky (space) is continually being expanded (51:47). There are indeed many other passages of scientific import in the Qur'ân, specially relating to the origin and creation of man, nature and the universe.[3] It is not feasible here to refer even

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1 WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 6.
2 ARBERRY, *op.cit.*, 545.
3 See for instance M. BUCAILLE, *op.cit.*

briefly to all of them. A few of them bearing on the question of the earth's shape may, however, be mentioned here.

The most significant in this respect is the statement at 91:6 which says that the earth has been thrown (in its orbit? in the space?) like a ball. The statement runs as : والأرض وما طحاها – "By the earth and He Who threw it (like a ball." It may be noted that like the word *daḥâhâ* (79:30) this word *ṭaḥâhâ* also has been rendered by many early scholars as "spread out", "expanded", etc. Significantly, however, both Al-Qurṭubî and Al-Shawkânî, while noticing the interpretations put on the word by the previous commentators, point out that the Arabs understood the word in the sense of going or moving away.[1] The meaning is further clarified by the author of the *Tâj al-'Arûs* who, while noticing the meanings put on the word by the early commentators, points out that the word means "throwing" something, for instance a ball (و طحا بالكرة رمى بها).[2] This expression thus agrees well with the meaning of *dahâhâ* as explained above and both indicate the spherical shape of the earth and its rotation in the space. It may further be noted that the statements immediately preceding 91:6, particularly 91:3-4, have a significant bearing on the point as they describe the relationship of day and night with the sun. The statements run as: والنهار اذا جلاها والليل اذا يغشاها – "By the day as it reveals it (the sun). By the night as it conceals it." These two statements make it quite clear that it is the action of the day and the night which brings to view the sun and conceals it, not that any movement of the sun causes day and night. The precision in the statements would be all the clearer if attention is paid to 91:1 wherein the sun is referred to . It simply states: "By the sun and its brightness" (والشمس و ضحاها). No action or verb is ascribed to it here. A little regard to such precise use of words would make it clear that they imply important scientific facts regarding the shape of the earth and its rotation.

The significance of the earth's having been "thrown" (*ṭaḥâhâ*) becomes very clear if it is considered along with another very important Qur'ânic statement relating to the origin of the earth itself and of life on it. It says that initially the sky and the earth were joined together in one mass, that subsequently they were separated and that every living being on the earth originated in water. The passage runs as follows:

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[1] AL-QURṬUBÎ, *Tafsîr*, XX, 74-75; AL-SHAWKÂNÎ, *Tafsîr*, V, 449.

[2] *Tâj al-'Arûs*, X, 223. See also E.W. LANE, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, under *tahw* (طحو) and *taḥy* (طحى) where, besides the other meanings, it is noted: " طحا is said when one throws down a man upon his face." (Cambridge Islamic Texts Society print, 1984, Vol.II, 1832).

أو لم ير الذين كفروا أن السماوات والأرض كانتا رتقا ففتقناهما وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي أفلا يؤمنون

"Or, do the unbelievers not see that the heavens and the earth were joined in one mass, and then We clove them asunder, and made out of water every living being? Will they not then believe?" (21:30)

The significance of this passage has become clear only with the progress of scientific knowledge in modern times about the origin of our planet and of life on it. Another Qur'ânic statement directly relating to the earth is 13:41 which says that it is gradually contracting, as is indeed established by modern research. The statement runs as follows: ... أو لم يروا أنا نأتي الأرض ننقصها من أطرافها "Have they not realized that We bring the earth to contraction in its extremities?" (13:41)

As regards the night gradually merging into the day and vice-versa we have a number of other Qur'ânic statements of which the following are very specific:

(a) تولج اليل في النهار و تولج النهار فياليل –"Thou causest the night to enter into the day and Thou causest the day to enter into the night." (3:27)

(b) ذلك بأن الله يولج اليل في النهار و يولج النهار فياليل –"That is because Allah makes the night enter into the day and makes the day enter into the night. (22:61)

(c) ألم تر أن الله يولج اليل في النهار و يولج النهار في اليل –"Do you not see that Allah makes the night enter into the day and makes the day enter into the night?" (31:29)

(d) and (e)يولج اليل في النهار و يولج النهار في اليل –"He makes the night enter into the day and makes the day enter into the night." (35:13 and 57:6)

(f) ... و ءاية لهم اليل نسلخ منه النهار –"And a sign for them is the night. We gradually withdraw from it the day." (36:37)

These repeated statements of the Qur'ân about the gradual merging of the day and the night into each other, and not each appearing suddenly on the surface of the earth as would have been the case if it were flat, are clear pointers to the spherical shape of the earth. Still clearer, however, is the following:

يكور اليل على النهار و يكور النهار على اليل

"He makes the night roll over the day and He makes the day roll over the night." (39:5).

It is to be emphasized that the word *kawwara* (whence *yukawwiru*) means to roll into a ball or to make round. In other words, the *'âyah* says that the night and the day are a continuous process *round* the earth.

(b) *Concerning the sky*

The Qur'ân refers not only to the earth and what it produces by Allah's leave, it also draws man's attention to the skies and the universe in order to bring home to him the theme of His Existence and Omnipotence. And in so doing it makes

statements of which the full significance and meaning are unfolding themselves only with the progress of our scientific knowledge. But as in the case of the earth, so in respect of the sky Watt states that the Qur'ân only picks up the prevailing erroneous notion and conceives the sky to be something built of solid materials, "presumably of stone."[1] He bases his assertion on four out of the eight Qur'ânic passages he cites in connection with what he imagines scientific errors in the Qur'ân. These four passages, together with his translation of them, are as follows:

(a) 79:27-28 = ءأنتم أشد خلقا أم السماء بناها رفع سمكها فسواها

"Are you harder to create or the heaven he built? He raised up its roof and ordered it."

(b) 88:17-18 = أفلا ينظرون الى الابل كيف خلقت والى السماء كيف رفعت

"Will they not regard the camels, how they are formed? and the heaven how it is raised?"

(c) 51:47 = والسماء بنيناها بأييد وانا لموسعون

"The heaven we have built with hands, and it is we who make it of vast extent...."

(d) 2:22 = جعل لكم الأرض فراشا والسماء بناء

"(Your Lord) made for you the earth a carpet and the heaven an edifice..."

In the above quoted passages there occur the expressions *banâhâ, banaynâhâ* and *binâ'* respectively in (a), (c) and (d). Understandably, Watt has so translated them as would best illustrate the point he wants to make. But even accepting his rendering of the terms, it may be pointed out that the words "build" and "edifice" are not exclusively used in respect of solid objects. They may very well be applied to non-solids as well as abstract ideas and objects. At any rate, his translation of the expression *wa 'innâ la-mûsi'ûn* as "and we make it of vast extent" is not quite correct. The exact meaning of the expression, as pointed out above, is: "And We do expand it" or "We are in the process of expanding it."

Now, knowing as we do at the present time that just as an atom is a "structure" or "edifice" "built" of certain elements, similarly the whole universe and its component parts, the innumerable systems (like the solar system) as a whole and each individually are very much a structure, a set-up, an integrated construction, an organism or, figuratively, even an "edifice". Hence the terms "built", "created", "formed", etc., may appropriately be applied to them, especially to the solar system, to which the earth and the neighbouring planets belong. The question is how one sees it, as Watt himself seems to recognize. The terms by themselves do not mean that the Qur'ân conceives the sky to be something of a solid object.

[1] WATT, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 5.

Similarly the term *samk* in (c) , which Watt translates as "roof", has other meanings as well as height, expansiveness, extensiveness and *burj* or zone of constellation.[1] Of course the Qur'ân does in other places refer to the sky as "the raised roof" (*al-saqf al-marfû'*)[2] and a "protected roof" (*saqfan mahfâzan*).[3] The word *saqf* in Arabic originally means a cover or a roof over anything. The term is therefore appropriately applicable to the immediate sphere around our atmospheric belt, or the latter itself, for both of them are very much "protected" and "protecting" covers over us, the earth, and both of them, as will be seen presently, are included in *al-samâ'* or the sky as conceived in the Qur'ân.

Apart from these four passages, however, there are many other statements in the Qur'ân which Watt does not take into account but which show that its view of the sky is not so primitive as he thinks it to be. These other passages may be classified into three broad categories – (a) those that speak about the state of the sky at the beginning of the creation, (b) those that give an idea of the nature and contents of the sky as they are now and (c) those that speak about their state in the end.

As regards the state of the sky at the beginning of the creation, two passages are of special significance. The one, 41:11, says that at the beginning the sky was only "smoke" (or vaporous or gaseous– و هى دخان). The other, 21:30, states that the skies and the earth were initially one mass but they were subsequently cloven asunder.[4] Modern scientists have different theories about the origin of the universe. Neither is the present writer competent to speak on the subject, nor is the present work a suitable place for a discussion on it. Speaking in general as a layman, however, two statements may safely be made in this connection. First, the various modern theories about the origin of the universe seem only to approximate the position stated so clearly in the Qur'ân. Second, these Qur'ânic statements go inconceivably beyond the notion about the sky prevalent in sixth-seventh century world.

The passages speaking about the nature and contents of the sky are more numerous. The most striking point in these passages is the plural form, *al-samâwât*, which occurs some 190 times in the Qur'ân, while in its singular form, *al-samâ'*, it comes some 120 times. More interestingly, at least at nine places the Qur'ân

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[1] See *Lisân al-'Arab* under *samk* and *Taâ al-'Arûs*, VII, 145.

[2] Q. 52:5.

[3] Q. 21:32.

[4] See *supra*, p. 81. The text runs as:... أو لم ير الذين كفروا أن السماوات والأرض كانتا رتقا ففتقناهما

specifically mentions that there are "seven skies",[1] one adjoining and corresponding to the other, *ṭibâqâ* (طباقا) or in layers.[2] It is now a generally accepted view with the scientists that the universe consists of several staggeringly expansive spaces, some enumerating exactly seven, each corresponding to and adjoining the other and each with its own constellations and meteors! The "skies" or the "seven skies" spoken of in the Qur'ân for about 200 times thus appear to assume a new significance and meaning in the light of this modern knowledge. For one thing, no person in the seventh century looking at the sky with bare eyes and imagining it to be something of a solid structure would venture to say so categorically and repeatedly that there are seven such structures, one above or beside the other. Nor was one in need of indulging in such unusual and, in the Prophet's case, a definitely hazardous statement. In this respect too the Qur'ân goes far beyond the seventh century notion about the sky.[3]

Equally significant are the statements about how the skies and objects therein are held in their respective positions. It is very clearly mentioned that while "raising" the sky Allah also set the "balance".[4] It is also mentioned that the sky is not such a structure as is rested on visible pillars.[5] Most important of all, it is stated that the skies (*al-samâwât*) and the earth are sustained by Allah's will. The statement runs as follows:

ان الله يمسك السماوات والأرض أن تزولا و لئن زالتا ان أمسكهما من أحد من بعده ....

"Verily Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they should cease to be there; and if they ceased to be there, there is none except He Who could hold them." (35:41)

The expression "holding" in respect of the "skies" as well as the earth is very significant. It means that neither is the earth rested on something "solid" nor are the skies so. In other words, the passage says that they are held in their respective positions without solid supports, that is in space, by Allah's will and design

A third and bewildering fact mentioned about the sky, as mentioned earlier,[6] is that it is in the process of continuous expansion. Modern scientific knowledge is surprisingly in line with this statement of the Qur'ân. It may further be noted in this connection that the Qur'ân also describes the seven skies as "seven ways" or tracks. Thus 23:17 states

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[1] Q. 2:29; 17:44; 23:17; 23:86; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15 and 78:12.

[2] Q. 67:3 and 71:15. The term *tibâqâ*, though often translated as "one above the other), more correctly menas "in layers" or "corresponding to one another". See Lane's *Lexicon*.

[3] Watt quickly passes over this fact by saying: "There is also mention of seven heavens."(*Muhammad's Mecca*,5.)

[4] Q. 55:7 = والسماء رفعها و وضع الميزان

[5] Q. 13:2 and 31:10.

[6] *Supra*, pp. 78-79.

و لقد خلقنا فوقكم سبع طرائق و ما كنا عن الخلق غافلين

"And We have created above you seven ways, and We are not unmindful of the creation." (23:27)

The full significance of such statements in the Qur'ân may be understood only in the light of modern scientific knowledge about the movement of the heavenly bodies.

Another significant fact about the skies mentioned in the Qur'ân is that there are living beings in them, and not simply on this our planet, the earth. Thus 42:29 very distinctly states:

و من ءاياته خلق السماوات والأرض و ما بث فيهما من دابة ....

"And of His signs is the creation of the skies and the earth and what He has spread forth in both of them of living beings."

There are other passages too that give the same impression.[1] Finally, of the seven skies, the nearest in relation to us is described in the Qur'ân as *al-samâ' al-dunyâ* or the "nether sky". More significantly, it is very specifically stated that this the "nether sky" is decorated with stars (*kawâkib*) and incandescent lights (*maṣâbîḥ*). Thus 41:12, after referring to Allah's having created the seven skies and set in each sky its order (و أوحى في كل سماء أمرها) adds: و زينا السماء الدنيا بمصابيح –"and We decorated *the nether sky* with incandescent lights."

The same thing is stated in 67:5, while 37:6 states: انا زينا السماء الدنيا بزينة الكواكب –"Verily We have decorated the nether sky with the stars....."

This feature is thus especial to the "nether sky" or the immediate sky. The reference here is obviously to the vast region of space in which the solar system and the neighbouring constellations exist. Modern scientific knowledge seems to be grappling with the nature and scope of the "nether sky" only. According to the present state of that knowledge, this "nether sky" is "roofed" by the "milky way" which contains at least one thousand billion stars, none of them being smaller than the sun!

With regard to this "nether sky" the notion of space is conveyed by the fact that the heavenly bodies – the sun, the moon, the stars – are described as having been set "in" (*fî*) it and that they are made to move in certain well regulated ways and for specified terms. Thus 13:2 states: و سخر الشمس والقمر كل يجري لأجل المسمى – "And He has subjected to order the sun and the moon; each runs (its course) for a term specified...." Similarly 36:38-40 states:

والشمس تجري لمستقر لها ذلك تقدير العزيز العليم والقمر قدرناه منازل حتى عاد كالعرجون القديم

[1] See for instance Q. 16:49; 17:55; 19:93; 21:19; 23:71; 24:41; 27:65; 28:18; 30:26.

لا الشمس ينبغي لها أن تدرك القمر ولا اليل سابق النهار و كل في فلك يسبحون

"The sun runs its course to a destination for it; that is the ordaining of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. And the moon We have set for it stations, till it reverts to the like of a withered palm-bough. It behoves not the sun to overtake the moon, neither does the night outstrip the day. And each swims in an orbit (space)."

Whatever interpretation one may like to put on the terms *mustaqarr* and *falak* in the above passage, the sense of motion and movement on the one hand, and that of space on the other, are all too clear from the expressions *yajrii, tajrî* and *yusbiḥûn*

That the term *samâ'* (sky) embraces the open space above (or around) us is clearly indicated by such passages as 16:79 and 30:48. The first passage states:

ألم يروا الى الطير مسخرات في جو السماء

"Do they not look at the birds subjected to order *in the midst of the sky*?...."

The second passage, 30:48, states:

الله الذى يرسل الرياح فتثير سحابا فيبسطه في السماء كيف يشاء ...

"It is Allah Who sends the winds that raise the clouds. Thus He spreads them *in the sky* as He wills...."[1]

Coming to the group of passages that speak about the end, the most important thing to note is that the skies, along with the stars, the planets and all the other creation, will be brought to an end. "That day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling up of the scroll of writings. As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it..."[2] That day the sky will "disintegrate with clouds;[3] it will come up with "visible smoke";[4] it "will be in a state of commotion";[5] it "will be rent asunder and turn red like paint";[6] it "will be like molten brass";[7]the stars will be displaced and scattered[8] and the sun and the moon will be joined together.[9] Finally, a new world and new skies will be ushered in, as the Qur'ân states:

يوم تبدل الأرض غير الأرض و السماوات ....

"That day the earth will be exchanged for another earth, and the skies too." (14:48)

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[1] The Qur'ân sometimes also figuratively employs the term *samâ'* for rain. Such passages are not, however, relevant to the present discussion.

[2] Q. 21:104 =... يوم نطوى السماء كطي السجل للكتب كما بدأنا أول خلق نعيده

[3] Q. 25:25 = و يوم تشقق السماء بالغمام و نزل الملائكة تنزيلا

[4] Q. 44:10 = فارتقب يوم تأتي السماء بدخان مبين

[5] Q. 52:9 = يوم تمور السماء مورا

[6] Q. 55:37 = فاذا انشقت السماء فكانت وردة كا الدهان

[7] Q. 70:8 = يوم تكون السماء كا المهل

[8] Q. 82:1-2 = و اذا الكواكب انثرت

[9] Q. 75:9 = و جمع الشمس والقمر

Thus will be the end of the present state of the world and the universe and the beginning of a new life and a new world – the hereafter.

The process thus described belongs to the future, and Allah Alone knows when and how these will be effected. So far as modern science is concerned, it only speculates that the world may come to an end as a result of some serious disturbance and dislocation in the solar and planetary systems. It is thus not in disharmony with the Qur'ânic statements noted above.

The expressions "folding up", "rent asunder" and the like used in connection with the end of the skies may give an impression that these are objects susceptible of being "broken up". Like the terms "edifice" (*binâ'*) and "roof" (*saqf*), these expressions also may be interpreted without assuming the skies to be "solid" objects, particularly as the process described includes the stars, the planets and other heavenly bodies. Similarly, the existence of living beings in the skies does not mean that these latter should be solid objects; for, just as the earth is set in the sky (space), so there are other earths in the skies. The Qur'ân very clearly states at 65:12: الله الذى خلق سبع سماوات و من الأرض مثلهن ... – "Allah is He Who created the seven skies, and of the earth the like of them." (65:12)

Also, it should be noted that the other living beings may have other types of physique and constitution; so their places of habitation may be different in nature than that of ours. Again, since even human beings become "weightless" at a certain distance in the space and may move about therein without the "support" of "solid" objects, it would be wrong to assume on the basis of the existence of living beings in the skies that these latter are therefore "solid" things.

It should be clear from the above discussion that there are certain expressions in the Qur'ân which, if approached with the primitive notion about the sky, would fit in with that notion, but they are very much appropriate to the modern concept of the sky and the universe. Above all, it should not be lost sight of that the present state of our knowledge is confined only to a part of what constitutes the "nether sky", *al-samâ' al-dunyâ*. The region lying beyond this nearest sky with all its stars and planets, is simply beyond our knowledge. Even the scientists admit that what they have hitherto learnt about the extent and nature of the sky is only a microscopic particle in relation to what remains unknown of it. What lies beyond this known or supposedly known region is completely dark to us. In view of all these it would be simply presumptuous to assume that the Qur'ânic statements about the sky are not in accord with modern scientific knowledge. At

any rate, Watt's assumption that the Qur'ânic view of the sky is primitive, reflecting the state of knowledge in the seventh century is wrong in three main respects. He picks up only a few statements in the Qur'ân, approaches them with the "primitive" notion and puts a very narrow construction on them. Second, he ignores a large number of other statements in the Qur'ân that are surprisingly in accord with modern scientific information about the sky and the significance of which may be fully appreciated with the further progress of our knowledge. Third, he seems to assume that the modern scientists have the last word about the sky and that nothing remains to be known about it, which is not at all the case; for the scientists themselves admit that they have not fathomed even a particle of the vast and bewildering creation, the sky.

PART II
THE ORIENTALISTS ON THE QUR'ÂNIC *WAḤY*

CHAPTER IV
THE ORIENTALISTS ON THE QUR'ÂNIC *WAḤY*: I. THE VIEWS OF MUIR AND MARGOLIOUTH

I. Preliminary Remarks

The genuineness of the Qur'ân as Allah's words and a divinely sent-down scripture, the claim of Islam as a divinely communicated religion and the status of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) as Allah's Prophet and Messenger, all revolve round the question of *waḥy* or divine communication to him. Naturally, therefore, the subject of *waḥy* has received a good deal of the orientalists' attention. Especially since the middle of the nineteenth century they have advanced a number of assumptions and theories about it. In general, the aim of all these theories and assumptions is to show, by one argument or another, that the texts making up the Qur'ân were Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) own composition. The most that the orientalists seem to concede is that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) might have been sincere in his conviction that he was given the texts by Allah; nevertheless these were the products of his own mind and thought.

It is understandable that neither any orientalist, nor, for that matter, a non-Muslim, could conscientiously and without being skeptical about his own religion admit that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was Allah's Messenger and that the Qur'ân is Allah's words. What is special with the orientalists, however, is that they do not leave the matter there by simply denying divine origin for the Qur'ân and divine commission for Muḥammad (p.b.h). They proceed further than that and endeavour to show, from the Islamic sources and texts, that that really is the case. And in so far as they do so, they in effect assume the role of missionaries of their own faiths and they generally twist the facts and misinterpret the texts in order to sustain their assumptions.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century the orientalists' views about the Qur'ânic *waḥy* have passed through three distinct stages of evolution. The first stage started with the publication in 1858 of William Muir's *Life of Mahomet.* His views and assumptions about *waḥy* and the Prophethood of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) in general were adopted more or less by almost all the other writers during the rest of the century and the first decade of the twentieth century. The state of the orientalists' attitude in this respect at the beginning of the twentieth century was reflected, with some modification and addition, in David Samuel Margoliouth's

Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, the third and revised edition of which was published in 1905. The second stage of development took place since then and was best typified by the writings of Richard Bell since the thirties till the early fifties of the century. The third and contemporary stage began with the publication in 1953 of William Montgomery Watt's *Muhammad at Mecca.* He has since then produced other works, notably his *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (1969) and *Muhammad's Mecca* (1988). Drawing on and building upon his predecessors' views, particularly those of his preceptor Bell, Watt has advanced a good deal of assumptions and conclusions about *waḥy* and the nature of the Qur'ân. In the present and following three chapters, these three stages in the development of the orientalists' views about *waḥy* are analysed and examined.

II. MUIR'S ASSUMPTIONS

Muir's basic assumption was that Muḥammad (p. b. h.) was ambitious and that being depressed by the debasement of his people he sought relief in meditation and reflection at Mount Ḥirâ'. Gradually certain grand ideas, such as God the Sole Creator and Ruler, the wretchedness of heathenism and idolatry, resurrection, judgement and recompense of good and evil, and life after death, etc., took shape in his mind. He gave vent to these ideas in what is called "fragments" of poetry and "soliloquy" on the state and prospects of mankind, and in prayers for guidance. As instances of these early "fragments" of poetry Muir quotes in his own translation *sûrahs* 103 (*al-'Asr*) and 100 (*al-'Âdiyât*); and as instances of "soliloquy" and "prayer" he quotes, respectively, *sûrahs* 101 (*al-Qâri'ah*) and 1 (*al-Fatiḥah*).[1] Muir admits that these were "couched in words of rare force and beauty". Sometimes the "oracle", further says Muir, came "direct from the Deity, speaking as 'We', and to Mahomet as 'Thou'." As an instance of this last category he quotes in translation *sûrah* 95 (*al-Tîn*).[2]

Yet, says Muir, the conviction of being inspired was not attained by Muhammad (p.b.h.). It came to him "after a protracted period of mental throes." In the meantime he is said to have raised the "voice of expostulation and alarm", as in *sûrah* 104 (*al-Humazah*), and to have alluded to Arab and Jewish legends as well as to "national miracles" and sentiments. As instances of these, part of *sûrah* 89 (*al-Fajr*) and *sûrahs* 105 and 106 (*al-Fîl* and *al-'Îlâf*) in full are quoted in

[1] MUIR, *Life etc.*,, third edn. 35-39.
[2] *Ibid.*, 39.

translation.[1] Muḥammad (p.b.h), says Muir, was still groping for the truth, and *sûrah* 90 (*al-Balad*) is quoted in full in translation in support of this statement.[2]

Thus the Prophet, according to Muir, continued to give "vent to his reveries in poetry" for several years "before he assumed the office of a divine teacher." During this period a small group including Waraqah, 'Alî, Khadîjah and 'Abû Bakr (r.a.) became his followers, the first three, says Muir, putting the early *sûrahs* to writing, for "Mahomet did not himself write."[3] Outside that little circle, continues Muir, his preachings were met by gross ignorance and opposition, the Quraysh leader 'Abû Jahl and his group sneered at him and the general body of Quraysh remained "careless and indifferent."

At such a stage, says Muir, the need for appearing as a Prophet was brought home to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) when, the "more susceptible among the citizens", while listening to him, pointed out that they would lead a purer life if a Prophet was sent to them, just as Prophets had been sent to the Jews and Christians. In support of this statement Muir cites the Qur'ânic passage 35:42 and says that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) felt the force of the reply and made a searching of his own heart whereby he came to the conviction that the ideas and compositions he had been putting forth all constituted a "supernatural call, a divine mission."[4] In such a state of mind he sought reassurance in God's past favours on him as is evident from *sûrahs* 93 (*al-Ḍuḥâ*) and 94 (*al-Sharḥ*).[5] Finally, while seated or wandering amidst the peaks of Ḥirâ', "an apparition rose before him". Jibrîl stood "close and clear beside him in a vision" and "approaching within 'two bow-lengths', brought from his master the memorable behest of *sûrat al-'Alaq*.[6] "Thus was Mahomet led", concludes Muir, "after a protracted period of doubt and hesitancy – to give forth his message as proceeding directly from the Almighty. Henceforth he spoke literally *in the name of the Lord.* And so scrupulous was he, ... that every sentence of the Coran is prefaced by the divine command, SPEAK or SAY; which, if not expressed, is always to be understood."[7] Even after that he was taunted as a poet, a sorcerer or one possessed by the demons. Hence he fell back on his commission and in his perplexity stretched himself on his bed, wrapping his garments around him and "fell into a trance". The angel was "at hand" and the

[1] *Ibid.*, 30-40.
[2] *Ibid.*, 41.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, 42-43.
[5] *Ibid.*, 43. Muir quotes here these two *sûrahs* in full in translation.
[6] *Ibid.*, 45-46.Muir quotes here the entire *sûrah* in translation.
[7] *Ibid.*, 46. Muir quotes in the footnote *sûrah* 112 (*al-'Ikhlâs*).

Prophet was "aroused from despondency to energy and action" by the reanimating message of *sûrat al-Muddaththir.*[1]

Muir claims that he has thus traced from the "various intimations gathered from the Coran itself" the steps by which Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was led to assume the office of Prophet.[2] Muir then summarizes what he calls the traditional account by reproducing mainly the account given by Al-Wâqidî. In conclusion he refers to the manners and methods of the coming of *waḥy*, which he calls the Prophet's "ecstatic periods" and says that those were "reveries of profound meditation, swoons connected with morbid excitability of mental or physical constitution", which varied at different periods and under different circumstances.[3]

Thus, according to Muir, Muḥammad (p.b.h.), by seeing the debased condition of his people, took to meditation and reflection as a result of which certain grand ideas about God and man came to his mind, that he gave vent to those ideas in fragments of poetry and soliloquy, that when some of his listeners said that they would be more amenable to the preachings of a Prophet, he rethought his position and persuaded himself that the ideas and messages he had been giving out were from God, that in that state of mind he saw an "apparition" which he thought to be the angel delivering to him a text and that he continued to receive and give out such texts through ecstatic "swoons" and "trances" which were due to the morbid excitability of his mind and constitution. The last mentioned aspect of Muir's suggestions is only an extension of his other assumption made in connection with the Prophet's childhood that he was a victim of epilepsy or fainting fits.

These assumptions and suggestions are all wrong and untenable, being based on a gross distortion of the facts and circumstances relating to the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet. They are also illogical and inconsistent.

Muir's basic assumption is that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was ambitious and made preparations for playing the role of a Prophet. Yet it is suggested that he did not reach the conviction of being "inspired" till "after a protracted period of mental throes" and "honest striving after truth" and further that he gave vent to his "reveries" for "several years before he assumed the office of a divine teacher." Clearly, the two strains are antithetical. If the Prophet had really been ambitious and had made plans and preparations for playing the role of a Prophet, he would

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1 *Ibid.*, 47-48.Muir here quotes in translation the *sûrah* with slight omissions.

2 *Ibid.*, 48.

3 *Ibid.*, 51.

not have embarked upon his project till after his plans had fully matured and he had settled his lines of action. On the other hand if, on account of his contemplation, reflection and "honest striving after truth" certain grand ideas "took clear and definite shape before him", then the Prophet did not obviously act according to prior plans and preparations. In fact, Muir's theory that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) felt the need for appearing as Prophet only after some of his listeners had said that they would lead a purer life if a Prophet was sent to them is a contradiction by himself of his theory of ambition and preparation on the Prophet's part.

In truth, the case was neither the result of plans and preparation nor that of meditation and contemplation. The Prophet did of course engage himself in solitary stay and reflection, but that was in no way done in response to his listeners' desire to have a Prophet among them, nor was the text he delivered to his people a product of his contemplation. It was something entirely extraneous to himself and he had in no way thought of it nor expected it. That was the reason why, by all accounts, he was bewildered, puzzled and terrified at the sudden turn of events and was not initially sure of his new position. His uncertainty was clearly due to the absence of any design and ambition on his part and to the suddenness and unexpectedness of the development. It also shows that the text which he received as revelation was no product of his thinking and reflection. But whatever the nature of his initial uncertainty and bewilderment, that state did not definitely last for "several years" and it was clearly the result of the coming of the first *waḥy* to him and of the circumstances attending it. Muir uses this "effect" of the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet as the cause and prior circumstances of it – thus completely reversing the process of development as narrated in all the sources.

Muir states that the Prophet did not attain the conviction of being "inspired" and did not assume "the office of a divine teacher" for several years. Yet, Muir would have us believe that the Prophet nonetheless preached his "ideas" and called upon his people to accept his message so much so that while a small number became his followers, the generality of the Quraysh mocked at him and opposed him. Now, the questions that naturally suggest themselves to any reader of this account are: (a) is it conceivable that a person who is not yet sure about his own position nor about the nature of his message would at the same time come out in the open, seek converts to his teachings and face insults and opposition in

consequence? (b) Is it reasonable to assume that a group of persons, however small, would respond to his call unless they were convinced of the truth and divine origin of the message? And how could they be so while the preacher himself of the message was supposedly not so sure about himself and about the nature of his message? (c) Is it reasonable to think that the great body of the Quraysh would turn against the preacher unless they were sure about the seriousness of his claims and of his teachings? Muir does not of course ask himself these very natural questions but expects his readers to take the absurdity from him.

But the climax of Muir's inconsistency lies in the suggestion, on the one hand, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) did not give out his call "in the name of the Lord" till after several years of hesitation and groping for the truth and, on the other, in the statement that during that initial period the "oracle" did sometimes "come direct from the Deity, speaking as 'We' and to Mahomet as 'Thou'." Now, one clearly fails to understand how this type of deliverances differ in any way from those made subsequently "in the name of the Lord". Indeed, Muir's basic inconsistency lies in the fact that he cites as many as 18 Qur'ânic *sûrahs* to illustrate what he supposes to be pre-*waḥy* or pre-Qur'ân deliverances of the Prophet!

Muir's most absurd proposition is that the need for giving himself out as Prophet dawned on Muḥammad (p.b.h.) when in the course of his preaching "the more susceptible of the citizens" pointed out that they would lead a purer life if a Prophet was sent to them, like those unto the Jews and the Christians. Thereupon, we are told, Muḥammad (p.b.h.) reassessed his position and through a process of intense heart-searchings came to the conviction that he was divinely inspired and ultimately perceived the "vision" of the angel Jibrîl instructing him to "recite", i.e., to preach, "in the name of thy Lord". Now, imagine the position of a person who goes out to his people as a religious preacher and then, after having preached for several years and after having faced the opposition and ridicule of his people, takes the hint in the remark of some of them that they would listen to his counsel of reform if a Prophet came to preach to them. Thereupon the preacher revises his role and reappears to his people telling them that he has now received God's commission so that they should follow him. No person with an iota of common sense and intelligence in him would render himself so ludicrous

by acting so foolishly and naively. Yet, Muir not only attributes such naivety to the Prophet but also expects his readers to believe it.

This absurd story is made up by a series of twisting and mixing up of the facts on the one hand, and by misinterpreting the texts on the other. In the first place, Muir twists the well-known fact of the Prophet's bewilderment, apprehension and uncertainty consequent upon his receipt of the first revelation into a circumstance prior to that incident. He then mixes this bewilderment and uncertainty on the Prophet's part with the period of *fatrah* or pause in the coming of *waḥy*. Indeed, his second twisting takes place in connection with this fact. He conveys the impression that the period of *fatrah* is coterminous with the period during which the Prophet is alleged to have been struggling within himself and suffering from immense mental tension as to whether or not to give himself out as Prophet and speak in God's name. It may be noted that the nature of *fatrah*, as mentioned in all the reports about it, is completely different from what Muir would have us believe. Although the reports differ about its duration, they are all at one in saying that it was a period during which there was a pause in the coming of *waḥy*, *not a period previous to it.* The Prophet was of course anxious and restless during that period, but there is no suggestion in the sources that this restlessness was due to his mental tension about whether or not to speak in the name of God. Muir simply puts this unwarrantable interpretation on the fact of the Prophet's anxiety which was due to his non-receipt of *waḥy* for a period longer than the usual intervals between such communications. Incidentally, the reports about *fatrah* and the whole affair of the Prophet's anxiety and tension on that account are conclusive evidences of the fact that *waḥy* was not something emanating from the Prophet himself, nor was it something of his own making.

Such twisting of the facts is blended with misinterpretations of the texts, concluded by the misleading statement that the account of the steps by which Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was led to assume the office of Prophet is gleaned from the "various intimations gathered from the Coran itself." It must at once be pointed out that the "steps" which Muir mentions are only distortions and misinterpretation of the facts, including the fact of *fatrah* or pause in the coming of *waḥy*, are mentioned only in the reports, and not at all in the Qur'ân. And the Qur'ânic statements which Muir adduces as supportive evidence for his assumptions are mere misinterpretations by him.

The first notable misuse of the Qur'ânic text on Muir's part is with regard to the statement about the sin of speaking falsely in the name of God. The Qur'ân of course denounces it as the most odious sin, not once but at least at ten places.[1] A simple glance at these passages would make it clear that the statement is made either to rebut the unbelievers' allegation that what the Prophet was giving out to them was not really from Allah, or to denounce the practice of some of the People of the Book who tampered with Allah's revelation and gave out their own statements as His. Muir arbitrarily infers from these statements of the Qur'ân that the Prophet must have at an early stage of his career struggled within himself over the question of whether or not to speak falsely in God's name. There is nothing in the Qur'ân to warrant such an assumption.

The second grave misinterpretation of Muir's is his citation of *sûrahs* 93 (*al-Ḍuḥâ*) and 94 (*al-Sharḥ*) as evidence of the Prophet's alleged attempt to emancipate himself from the alleged mental tension as to whether or not to speak falsely in God's name and to reassure himself that he had indeed been favoured by God. The *sûrahs* in question of course remind the Prophet of Allah's favours on him; but there is nothing in them, or in the reports concerning the occasions of their revelation, to suggest that the Prophet recalled those past favours of Allah on him by way of emancipating himself from the mental tension as to whether or not to speak falsely in Allah's name or to persuade himself that what he was giving out constituted a divine mission. The explanation is solely Muir's imagination having no foundation in the Qur'ân itself, or in the reports.

The third misinterpretation is made in connection with the Qur'ânic passage 35:42 which says: "They swore their strongest oaths by Allah that if a warner came to them they would be better guided than one of the peoples (Jews and Christians)."[2] Muir assumes that this remark was made by the unbelievers to the Prophet when he was preaching to them and that because of this remark he thought of giving himself out as a Prophet. There is nothing in the reports or in the Qur'ân itself to support this assumption. The utter unreasonableness of the Prophet's undertaking any preaching work before his being sure of his own position and before giving himself out as Prophet has already been pointed out. It may be noted here that the statement cited was made by some Quraysh leaders not to the Prophet but long before his emergence on the scene and as a reaction

[1] See for instance Q. 3:94; 6:21; 6:93; 6:144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68 and 61:7.
[2] See also Q. 6:157.

to the report which reached them that the Jews and the Christians belied and disobeyed their Prophets.[1]

Lastly, Muir completely misunderstands or misinterprets the first *'âyah* of *sûrat al-'Alaq* when he assumes that since this *'âyah* is a command to the Prophet, "Read in the name of your Lord", previously to that he must have been preaching his doctrines *not* in the name of the Lord! Indeed, it is on a gross misinterpretation of this *'âyah* and the above noted passage 35:42 that Muir has built up his entire theory about what he calls the steps by which Muḥammad (p.b.h.) came to assume the role of a divine teacher. And to sustain that theory he has assumed that the Prophet gave out as many as 18 or more *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân before he claimed to have received his commission as Prophet and any *waḥy* from Allah!

Whatever view one may take about the Qur'ânic passages cited by Muir, the utter absurdities and inconsistencies of the various aspects of his theory, as mentioned earlier, render it totally untenable. Nonetheless, Muir's views have been taken over and adopted by his successor orientalists in some form or other. Notably, his theory of a period of "pre-*waḥy*" or "pre-Qur'an" deliverances by the Prophet has been reiterated by Bell,[2] though on different grounds; while this assumption, together with Muir's theory of gradual development of the Prophet's career and doctrines, have been taken over and pushed to an extreme by Watt who even suggests that the Prophet did not start with any clear concept of monotheism which came to him gradually after a prolonged period of preaching for as any as four or five years! But let us first take into account the views of Margoliouth, Muir's immediate intellectual successor.

III. MARGOLIOUTH'S ASSUMPTIONS

Like Muir's, Margoliouth's treatment of the subject of *wahy* is also an extension of the theme of ambition and design on the Prophet's part; but Margoliouth seems to have seen and avoided Muir's inconsistencies, though in the course of his treatment of the matter Margoliouth also has landed himself into fresh inconsistencies and absurdities. He assumes straight off that Muḥammad (p.b.h.), being highly ambitious, carefully thought out his intended role and when his plans matured fully he executed them skilfully. According to Margoliouth, the whole affair of *waḥy* was "trickery" and "imposture" from first to last. It is alleged that

[1] See Al-Qurṭubî, *Tafsîr*, XIV, 356; Al-Bayḍâwî, *Tafsîr*, II, 275 and Al-Shawkânî,*Tafsîr*, IV, 355-356.
[2] See *infra*, ch. V.

Muḥammad (p.b.h.), in accordance with his plans, acted the role of a "medium"[1] to "produce messages from the other world" and, in order to ensure his success, he so manoeuvred the form and manner of those messages that they would appear to be of "supernatural origin".[2] Thus, to produce a revelation Muḥammad (p.b.h.) would "instinctively", to use Margoliouth's words, fall "into a violent agitation, his face would turn livid, and he would cover himself with a blanket, from which he would emerge perspiring copiously, with a message ready."[3] This practice of covering himself with a blanket is said to have been retained by him "from first to last".[4] It is further alleged that the "epileptic fits" which the Prophet experienced "at some time" suggested the manner which he "artificially produced" without "the slightest preparation", accompanied by "snoring and reddening of the face."[5] This form, says Margoliouth, was "recognized as the normal form of inspiration."[6] So adept the Prophet is said to have become in the matter that he, as Margoliouth puts it, "would receive a divine communication in immediate answer to a question addressed him while he was eating, and after delivering it in this fashion, proceed to finish the morsel which he held in his hand when he was interrupted; or a revelation would come in answer to a question addressed him as he stood in the pulpit."[7]

As regards the contents of the revelations Margoliouth suggests that for these the Prophet "had to go back to the Jewish and the Christian scriptures" until he had plenty to say;[8] and that he claimed it a miracle that "he was made acquainted with the contents of books which he had never read", but that subsequently he said that "the miracle lay in his unrivalled eloquence."[9] However, the "earliest scraps of revelation", says Margoliouth, are "imitations of the utterances of revivalist preachers" like Quss ibn Sâ'ida. It is further alleged that the Prophet imitated the style of the usual Arabian oratory, which was some sort of rhyme, but "he little understood its nature."[10]

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[1] This characterization of the Prophet as "medium" has been adopted by others like Tor Andrae and Maxime Rodinson who, however, enlarges it as "megaphone".
[2] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 84.
[3] *Ibid.*, citing Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, XXVIII, 4.
[4] MARGOLIOUTH, *op.cit.*, 86.
[5] *Ibid.* (citing *Musnad*, IV, 222).
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.* (citing *Musnad*, VI, 56 & III, 21)
[8] *Ibid.*, 80, 86.
[9] *Ibid.*, 87.
[10] *Ibid.*, 87-88.

As regards the beginning of the revelation Margoliouth says that it was the Prophet's character to bide his time till the favourable moment. Hence he made use of a "period of transition between the old life and the new."[1] Drawing an analogy with Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon sect, who first wandered in a forest and subsequently gave out his "trance" utterances as divine message brought to his notice by angels, Margoliouth says that Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) prophetic career likewise began with a period of solitude. "For one month of the year", says Margoliouth, "the Meccans practised a rite called *taḥannuth*", which was a sort of asceticism. During this month "it was Mohammed's custom to retire to a cave in Mt. Hira..." At some time in that month when he had been alone in the valley, "occurred the theophany (or its equivalent)" which led to his "starting as a divine messenger". Margoliouth further says that in the traditions relating to the matter the communication is done by Jibrîl, "the angel who in the New Testament conveys messages", but in the Qur'ân "it appears to be God Himself Who descended and at a distance of rather less than two bow-shots addressed the Prophet..." Jibrîl was substituted "afterwards", says Margoliouth, probably "due to the development of the Prophet's theology."[2]

These are, in the main, the views of Margoliouth regarding *waḥy* and the Prophet's assumption of the role of a divinely commissioned teacher. Margoliouth clearly takes over from Muir the theme of ambition and preparation on the Prophet's part and develops it. Margoliouth also adopts the allegation of epilepsy and "trances" and attempts to fit these in his theory of "trickery" and imposture on the Prophet's part by saying that he artificially produced the symptoms. Above all, Margoliouth stresses, equally as does Muir, that the text of the Qur'ân, or the revelations generally, are the Prophet's own composition. In all these essential respects, thus, Margoliouth generally follows the foot-steps of his predecessor. Nevertheless, he adds some new assumptions that will be noticed presently.

Leaving aside the allegation of ambition and preparation on the one hand, and that of epilepsy on the other, both of which assumptions are totally groundless, Margoliouth's main allegation is that of trickery on the Prophet's part. He suggests that the Prophet so planned the form and manner of the revelation that it might appear to be of supernatural origin. It is even said that the Prophet had taken his cue from the phenomenon accompanying his alleged epileptic fits

[1] *Ibid.*, 90.
[2] *Ibid.*, 90-91.

earlier in his life and that he reproduced those phenomena, such as falling into trance, snoring and reddening of the face, perspiring, or covering himself with a blanket, etc. It is further said that this "came to be recognized as the normal form of inspiration". But the instances cited by Margoliouth himself show not a uniform but various manners of the coming of revelations to the Prophet. Most of these manners obviously do not fit in with the theory of trickery. Thus, (a) with regard to be beginning of revelation, which should have been considered the most important and decisive instance to substantiate the theory, Margoliouth admits that the Prophet received it all alone in the "valley" where there was none else to witness the form and manner of its coming. Also, neither does Margoliouth allege, nor do the sources indicate, that there was any such symptom on that occasion as falling into trance, etc. (b) Margoliouth cites the instances of the Prophet's receiving revelations while taking his meals or while standing on the pulpit. In these cases also the reports cited do not really suggest that the Prophet affected any such symptoms as snoring, reddening of the face, falling into trance, etc.[1] Moreover, these instances do not relate to the coming of Qur'ânic *waḥy* which is to be always distinguished from the other types of *waḥy* which the Prophet received from time to time. (c) Margoliouth also alleges that the Prophet let his "confederates act the part of Gabriel or let his followers identify some interlocutors of his with that angel."[2] The allegation is totally unjustified; but the allusion is clearly to the instances mentioned in the sources of Jibrîl's sometimes appearing in the form of a human being (sometimes as a stranger, sometimes in the appearance of a companion of the Prophet named Daḥiyah al-Kalbî) and delivering the revelation to him. In any case, this form, far from convincing the on-lookers about the supernatural origin of the text, was the more likely to expose the alleged trickery; for the individual who thus allegedly impersonated the angel was not to be let alone by the people who were generally in attendance upon the Prophet for most of the time. In all these cases there was no question of the Prophet's artificially reproducing the phenomena of epilepsy alleged to the "normal manner of inspiration". Thus the instances cited by Margoliouth himself do not at all substantiate the allegation of trickery on the Prophet's part.

Secondly, Margoliouth is also inconsistent in his assumption about the Prophet's solitary stay and contemplation (*taḥannuth*) at the cave of Hirâ'. Margoliouth suggests that like most "mediums" the Prophet planned it as a

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[1] See *Musnad*, III, 21 and VI, 56. These are reports respectively of 'Â'ishah and 'Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî (r.a.).

[2] Margoliouth, *op.cit.*, 88 (citing Ibn Sa'd, II, 520).

period of transition between the old life and the new. In the same breath, however, it is stated that the Makkans practised this rite during the month of Ramadân each year and that it was" Mohammed's (p.b.h.) custom to retire to a cave in Mt. Hira" during that month. Now, the report about the Makkans' practising *taḥannuth* during Ramaḍân is not at all credible; but leaving aside that question, it is clearly inconsistent to suggest, as Margoliouth does, that the period of *taḥannuth* was a planned period of transition from the old life to the new, and then to say in the same breath that in doing so at Ḥirâ' the Prophet was following a religious rite practised each year by the Makkans. The fact is that here Margoliouth has been trapped by another incorrect assumption of his, namely, that the Prophet, prior to his call, followed the religion of the pagan Makkans including the worship of their gods and goddesses.[1] Margoliouth is so enamoured of this faulty assumption of his that he unguardedly introduces it here without caring to see that it is totally inconsistent with his theory of a planned period of transition used by the Prophet.

Similar inconsistency pervades Margoliouth's assumption regarding the language and contents of the revelation. Thus, he says that the Prophet claimed his "unrivalled eloquence" to be a miracle[2] and then, a little further on, states that he merely imitated the "sort of rhyme" of the general Arabian oratory, "though he little understood it."[3] Again, with regard to the contents of the revelation Margoliouth observes that for them the Prophet "had to go back to Jewish and Christian scriptures", until the course of events provided him with plenty to say."[4] Elaborating this assumption Margoliouth further says: "Once the head of the state Mohammed had plenty to say: but at the commencement of his career, the matter was not provided by the circumstances." Hence "he hit on the plan of borrowing from the Old or New Testament."[5]

The allegation of borrowing from the Jewish and Christian sources has been dealt with separately.[6] Here it may be noted that Margoliouth practically nullifies his statement here by another gross inconsistency. Thus, having made the above mentioned remark he immediately carries out a *volte face* and says that the Prophet "followed this safe method" of borrowing from Judaeo-Christian scriptures when

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[1] *Ibid.*, 69-70.
[2] *Ibid.*, 87.
[3] *Ibid.*, 88.
[4] *Ibid.*, 80.
[5] *Ibid.*, 86.
[6] *Infra*, ch. II.

he was forced by circumstances to produce revelations in increasing quantities, but "the earliest scraps of revelation... appear to have been imitations of the utterances of revivalist preachers" like Quss ibn Sâ'ida.[1] Thus in one breath Margoliouth would have us believe that at the initial stage when the Prophet had not much to say he would borrow from the Judaeo-Christian scriptures until the progress of circumstances provided him with enough to say, and then, again, we are required to believe that the Prophet would adopt "this safe" method when the progress of circumstances made it necessary for him to produce revelations in increasing quantities! The inconsistency seems to have been due to an awareness on Margoliouth's part that the so-called "earliest scraps of revelation" do not really bear any resemblance with the Old and New Testament materials and that those parts of the Qur'ân that seem to resemble them in any way are not quite the initial revelations to the Prophet. As regards the anecdote about Quss ibn Sa'ida and the Prophet's having allegedly heard him speak at 'Ukâẓ it is far from being trustworthy. But even taking the report as it is, his reported utterances have but very faint resemblance with the early *sûrahs*. Nor would those utterances make up a fraction of the materials contained in the early revelations.

In advancing these inconsistent suggestions Margoliouth has resorted to a good deal of twisting of the facts. Thus the instances mentioned in the sources of the Prophet's having sometimes experienced hardships while receiving revelations have been twisted as symptoms of epilepsy; though anyone having an idea of the disease and its physical and mental effects on its victim would at once recognize that the Prophet's case was quite different from that ailment. A second twist with regard to the same fact is the assumption that the Prophet artificially produced those symptoms, though there is nothing in the sources to indicate that he had recourse to such trickery. Nor did the many followers and companions who closely surrounded him for over a score of years ever think such to be the case. A third twist in the same fact is the assertion that such allegedly artificially produced symptoms were the "normal" form of inspiration; though it is quite clear from the sources that the instances of physical hardships accompanying the receipt of revelations were only exceptional and very few and far between.

Similarly the fact of the angel Jibrîl's sometimes appearing in the form of a human being has been twisted as the Prophet's letting "confederates act the part of Gabriel". As already mentioned, such trickery was the more likely to expose

[1] Margoliouth, *op.cit.*, 87.

the trick than to impress the divine nature of the revelation upon the audience present on such occasions. This particular twisting is all the more strange on Margoliouth's part; for he notes at the same time that Jibrîl is the angel "who in the New Testament conveys messages."[1] One could be tempted to ask: If it was nothing unnatural for Jibrîl to be the conveyer of messages in the case of the New Testament prophets, why should it be so in the case of another prophet. To prove trickery in the latter's case it is necessary to point out the true manners in which the angel used to deliver messages to the New Testament prophets. Neither Margoliouth nor any of his intellectual disciples who adopt his views have, however, done it.

The twisting of the facts is generally done through misinterpretation of the texts. Indeed, it is often difficult to draw a line of distinction between the two. Such at least is the case of a writer of revelations who, it is alleged, abjured Islam because he was convinced that the affair of revelation was a fake.[2] The tradition cited by Margoliouth in this connection does in fact record the despicable end of an insincere convert to Islam who used to write down revelations for the Prophet but who abjured Islam, joined the Makkan opposition and gave out as reason for his abandoning Islam that the Prophet used to dictate some expressions to him but he would write something else instead, and when asked to correct the mistake he would insist on not changing what he had written. So, he says, the Prophet would permit him to write whatever he liked to write. It is made to appear that this happened more than once.[3]

Now, clearly this statement is that of a person who had turned hostile. On the face of it, thus, it is not at all worthy of credence. From the text of the report it is also clear that the person in question was an enemy in disguise who, by a fake profession of Islam, had infiltrated the ranks of the Muslims with the object of subverting Islam and the text of the revelations. In any case, common sense and reason would never accept as true what is given out by the person; for no reasonable individual, especially one who is supposed to be a shrewd and calculated impostor, would ever allow any of his clerks or followers to write whatever he liked to, and would then allow that text to be given out as the revelation. The report clearly indicates it to be a false allegation and describes the evil consequences that befell the calumniator. Margoliouth twists this false

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[1] Margoliouth, *op.cit*, 91.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Musnad*, III, 120-121.

allegation of the calumniator as evidence of the falsity of the revelation. Moreover, there is no reference in the report itself to the Prophet's having ever artificially produced the "symptoms" which Margoliouth cites as marks of the alleged trickery. Strangely enough, he finds no inference to be drawn from the instance of thousands of intelligent and sensible persons who followed the Prophet with rare devotion and dedication throughout their lives except that they were all mere dupes to his trickery and imposture!

IV. MARGOLIOUTH'S ASSUMPTION ABOUT THE VISION OF GOD

The most glaring of Margoliouth's assumptions, and this is his most notable addition to Muir's assumption, is his statement that from the Qur'ân it appears to be God Who Himself and "at a distance of rather less than two bow-shots" delivered the revelation to the Prophet and that Jibrîl was substituted afterwards as the conveyer of revelations. Though Margoliouth does not specifically cite it, the allusion is clearly to the Qur'ânic passage 53:4-10 (*sûrat al-Najm*). Subsequent writers, notably Richard Bell and W. M. Watt, have taken over from him this particular assumption. Before pointing out how Margoliouth and the other writers have misunderstood or misinterpreted the passage, it may be pointed out that this assumption of Margoliouth's too is somewhat inconsistent with his general thesis. He labours all through to show that the Prophet only imitated the previous Prophets, that he derived his ideas and information from the Old and New Testament, that his case was like that of Joseph Smith who unearthed the Book of Mormon "under the guidance of the angels" and that in the New Testament it is the angel Jibrîl who conveyed God's messages to His Prophets. Having said all these Margoliouth suggests, allegedly on the authority of the Qur'ân, that the Prophet initially claimed to have received the revelation directly from God. It is not explained why Muḥammad (p.b.h.) should have made such an unusual departure from the practice of all the other Prophets who received revelations through the angel and whom he is said to have merely imitated, and whether such a direct transaction with God, unseen and unobserved by anyone else, and keeping the angel completely out of the scene for a long time, would be the most appropriate method, as Margoliouth would have us believe the Prophet was careful to adopt, to impress the supernatural origin of his message upon his audience.

But let us consider the Qur'ânic passage on the basis of which Margoliouth advances his assumption. The passage runs as follows:

(٢) ما ضل صاحبكم و ما غوى (٣) و ما ينطق عن الهوى (٤) ان هو الا وحى يوحى (٥) علمه شديد القوى
(٦) ذو مرة فاستوى (٧) و هو بالأفق الأعلى (٨)ثم دنى فتدلى (٩) فكان قاب قوسين أو أدنى (١٠)فأوحى الى
عبده ما أوحى

"(2) Your companion (i.e., the Prophet) has not gone astray nor has he acted foolishly. (3) Nor does he speak out of (his) whims. (4) It is nothing but *wahy* (a communication) communicated (to him). (5) One very powerful taught him. (6) He possesses physical and mental robustness, and he positioned himself (7) while he was in the highest horizon. (8) Then he approached and came closer; (9) and was at a distance of two bow-lengths or even closer. (10) Thus did he communicate to His (Allah's) servant what He communicated." (53:2-10)

This passage has to be understood in the context of the situation in which it was revealed and also with reference to another Qur'ânic passage, 81:19-27 (*sûrat al-Takwîr*) which deals with the same theme. According to Muslim classical scholars as well as many orientalists, this latter passage is *earlier* in the order of revelation than 53:2-10.[1] Both the passages were revealed, however, in the context of the unbelievers' refusal to believe that the Prophet had received any revelation from Allah. They alleged that he had been under the influence of an evil spirit or had gone off his head. Both the passages rebut that allegation. The passage 81:19-27 runs as follows:

(١٩) انه لقول رسول كريم (٢٠) ذى قوة عند ذى العرش مكين (٢١)مطاع ثم أمين (٢٢) و ما صاحبكم بمجنون
(٢٣) ولقد رءاه بالأفق المبين (٢٤) و ما هو على الغيب بضنين (٢٥) و ما هو بقول شيطان رجيم (٢٦) فأين‌تذهبون
(٢٧) ان هو الا ذكر للعالمين

"(19) Verily this is a text (saying, *qawl*) delivered by an honourable messenger; (20) possessing power and rank near the Lord of the Throne. (21) Obeyed there and trusted. (22) And your companion (i.e. the Prophet) is not one possessed. (23) Surely he saw him (the honourable messenger) in the clear horizon. (24) Nor does he withhold a knowledge of the unseen. (25) Nor is it (the revelation) the saying of a devil, accursed. (26) Then whither do you go? (27) It is nothing but a recital to all the worlds." (81:19-27).

The points common to both the passages may be noted. First, both describe the Prophet's seeing an angel in the horizon. In 81:23, which is the earlier in the order of revelation, this entity is clearly described as "an honourable messenger", i.e., a messenger of Allah, an angel, and not "God" Himself. Second, though the passage 53:2-10 does not specifically mention that the entity was a "messenger", his description there is very much similar to that in 81:19-27. Thus, while in the latter passage he is described as one possessing power (*dhî quwwah*) and position near the Lord of the Throne, in 53:2-10 he is described as very powerful (*shadîd*

[1] According to the Muslim classical scholars *sûrahs al-Takwîr* and *al-Najm* were respectively the 7th and the 23rd in the order of revelation. Rodwell, Jeffery, Muir and Nöldeke hold them to be, respectively, 32nd and 46th, 24th and 27th, 27th and 43rd and 27th and 28th in the order of revelation.

al-quwwah) and possessing physical and mental robustness (*dhû mirrah*). Third, both the passages rebut the allegations of the unbelievers and both speak of the Prophet as "your companion" (*ṣâḥibu-kum*) because he was really one of Makkan community and was thoroughly known to them. Fourth, both the passages emphasize that the Prophet was not "one possessed" (81:22) nor had he strayed from the right path and acted foolishly (52:2). Fifth, both passages say that what the Prophet was giving out was a statement (*qawl*) given to him by an honourable messenger (81:19) and taught him by "one very powerful" (52:5). Sixth, both the passages reiterate that it was a revelation given to the Prophet (53:4), not the word of an evil spirit but a recital to all the worlds (81:25,27). The two passages thus speak of the same subject, give the same reply to the objections of the Makkan unbelievers and describe the entity seen in the horizon in similar phrases and adjectives. Each of the passages is thus explanatory of and complementary to the other. And since the earlier passage (81:19-27) specifically refers to the entity as a messenger, it cannot be assumed that the latter passage, 53:2-10, claimed it to be God Himself Who had descended to deliver the text to the Prophet. The same is true even if the order of revelation of the two passages is reversed; for; if the Prophet had been so inconsistent as to speak of the conveyer of the text as Allah in one piece of revelation and as an angel in another piece, he would have been very badly harassed by the unbelievers who were only too ready to find fault with him and to harass him.

Margoliouth's confusion may have arisen from his misunderstanding of the statement at 53:10, *fa 'awḥâ 'ilâ 'abdihi mâ 'awḥâ*. To understand the meaning of this expression it is necessary to bear in mind three important things. First, the letter *fa* with which the statement starts, has two senses - *istiqbâliyah*, i.e., sequential, meaning "then"; and *tafsîriyyah*, i.e., explanatory, meaning "thus" or "so". The second thing to note is the expression *'abdihi* in the statement. It definitely means His, i.e., Allah's servant, and may therefore be taken to refer either to the Prophet or to the angel Jibrîl. And third, it is essential to remember that in Arabic a pronoun, whether explicit or inherent in a verb, does not always relate to the immediate antecedent, as in English, but may relate to a nominative or subject understood from the context. Bearing these three things in mind, the meaning of the *'âyah* 53:10 may be understood. If the letter *fa* with which it starts is taken in the sequential sense, the meaning of the statement would be: "Then he (the angel-messenger) communicated to His Servant (i.e. the Prophet) what He (or he)

communicated." If, on the other hand, the letter *fa* is taken in its explanatory sense, then the meaning would be: "Thus or So (by means of the angel) He (Allah) communicated to His servant what He communicated". It would be manifestly wrong to disregard the internal evidences mentioned above, and also the context and the relation of the passage to the other passage, 81:19-27, and then, by fixing the eye on the expression *'abdihi* to assume that the passage speaks of God Himself appearing in the horizon and then descending to the Prophet to deliver to him the text of the revelation!

Thus, Margoliouth's assumption that the Prophet had initially claimed that God Himself had delivered to him the text of the revelation is wrong and untenable. Despite its untenability, however, this assumption of his has been taken over and reiterated by his successor orientalists, particularly by Bell and Watt. Consequently, they have also reiterated Margoliouth's other suggestion that Jibrîl was substituted as conveyer of the revelation at a subsequent stage. Margoliouth's main thesis that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) deliberately and on calculation acted the part of a Prophet and was otherwise an impostor is no new thing. It is essentially a repetition of the Medieval European approach to Islam and its Prophet. Recent European scholarship is of course shy of making such a blatant accusation against the Prophet; but when Watt, as would be seen presently, speaks of the Prophet's "inducing" the symptoms of revelation, it is in effect an echo not only of Margoliouth's view but, in fact, of that medieval European approach. In another respect Margoliouth appears to have indicated a new line of approach, that of having recourse to modern works on theosophy, philosophy or mysticism to explain the phenomenon of Islamic revelation. Thus, while he uses the work of Podmore on spiritualism to suggest that the Prophet, though known to be honest, could nevertheless play trickery and be mystifying, Watt, as would be seen presently, has recourse to the work of A. Poulain on mysticism to suggest that *waḥy* was a sort of "intellectual locution" on the part of Muḥammad (p.b.h.). [1]

[1] *Infra*, Chaps. VI and VII.

CHAPTER V
THE ORIENTALISTS ON THE QUR'ÂNIC *WAḤY*: II. THE VIEWS OF RICHARD BELL

I. SUMMARY OF BELL'S ASSUMPTIONS

Bell put forth his views mainly in a series of two articles published in two consecutive issues of the *Moslem World* for 1934[1]. In them he advanced the following suggestions:

(a) That the traditions regarding the coming of *waḥy* are inventions of a later age and are founded upon the Qur'ânic passage 53:1-18.

(b) That before he "encountered" the "visions" in the above mentioned passage the Prophet had been "speaking" in some manner but had not started delivering or composing the Qur'ân.

(c) That the term *waḥy* does not mean verbal communication of the text of the Qur'ân but "suggestions", "prompting" or "inspiration" to "compose" the Qur'ân.

(d) That according to the passage 53:1-18 the Prophet claimed to have seen Allah; but as he became better informed and also met with objections he mystified and introduced modifying verses in it giving the impression of a "spiritual vision".

(e) That as he subsequently became aware of the existence of angels he reasserted in *sûrah* 81 (*al-Takwîr*) that he had seen the angel messenger on the clear horizon; and

(f) That still more subsequently, at Madina, he introduced Jibrîl as the conveyer of *waḥy*.

It is to be noted that with the exception of the suggestions at (a) and (c) the other suggestions are merely a repetition of Muir's and Margoliouth's views discussed in the previous chapter. Thus the suggestion at (b), namely, that the Prophet had been "speaking" in some manner before delivering the Qur'ân is a reiteration of what Muir says about the Prophet's pre-*waḥy* or pre-Qur'ân deliverances.[2] Similarly the suggestions at (d), (e) and (f) are an elaboration of Margoliouth's assumptions that the Prophet initially claimed to have seen Allah and that subsequently he modified this by saying that an angel had delivered to him the text and that still more subsequently at Madina the angel Jibrîl was

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[1] RICHARD BELL, "Mohammed's call", *The Moslem World*, January, 1934, pp. 13-19 and "Mohammed's visions", *Ibid.*, April, 1934, pp. 145-154. The term "Moslem" has subsequently been modified into "Muslim" in the title of the journal.

[2] *Supra*, pp. 94-97.

introduced as the conveyer of *waḥy*. Let us now consider the suggestions one by one.

II. CONCERNING THE TRADITIONS ABOUT THE COMING OF *WAḤY*

Bell's reasons for discounting the traditions concerning the coming of *waḥy* are four. (i) He says that 'Â'ishah (r.a.), the original authority for the traditions, "was not born at the time of the Call, and could at best have got the story" from the Prophet himself and that much has subsequently "been attributed to her which she probably never said."[1] (ii) The story as it has come down to us "in the earliest form" in Ibn Isḥâq's/Ibn Hishâm's work makes 'Â'ishah (r.a.) responsible only for "the first part of it, viz., that the Messenger of Allah began by seeing true visions in sleep; that they came to him like the dawn of the morning, and that he began to love solitude. The rest of the story is given on quite a different, and far less reliable *isnâd*."[2] (iii) The statement that *taḥannuth* (the solitary stay and contemplation at Ḥirâ') was a pre-Islamic Quraysh practice, as mentioned in Ibn Ishâq's work, is not correct. The "ascetic note in such a practice was entirely alien to Mohammed's nature" and the "accompanying fasts" have no support in the Qur'ân. "Fasting was not introduced till the Madinan period, and then as an imitation of Jewish practice."[3] (iv) The expression *Nâmûs*, derived from the Greek term *nomos* and meaning Jewish law, could not have been used by Waraqah ibn Nawfal in his reported conversation with the Prophet; for the Qur'ân does not contain the expression, and, says Bell, as the Prophet was fond of "borrowing religious technical terms it was to be expected that, if he had known this word he would have used it, especially if Waraqa had used it at such a momentous point in his life." Hence the "whole story is the invention of a later age."[4]

Clearly, Bell seeks to cast doubt on the tradition about the coming of *waḥy* as given even in Ibn Ishâq's work with a view to proving that the account of the angel Jibrîl's coming with the *waḥy* to the Prophet is not reliable. His main hypothesis (i. e. at iv) that the term *Nâmûs* could not have been used by Waraqah and the Prophet at that time and that the "whole story is an invention of a later age" calls for a substantiation of three other hypotheses before it could be adduced as a valid argument. These hypotheses are : (a) that the Prophet himself composed the Qur'ân; (b) that he was fond of borrowing foreign religious technical terms and (c) that all unfamiliar terms (*gharâ'ib*) occurring in the *ḥadîth*

[1] *The Moslem World*, January, 1934, p. 14.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 16.
[4] *Ibid.*

literature should invariably be found in the Qur'ân. Needless to say, none of these hypotheses is an established fact. Particularly the crux of the whole argumentation, that the Prophet himself composed the Qur'ân, is the very point at issue and it should not therefore be first assumed as a fact and then that should not be made a point to prove that very fact.

Bell here seems merely to depend upon A. Jeffery's suggestion.[1] In fact this very argument about *Nâmûs* rebounds on Bell's own argument and destroys his thesis that the particular traditions about the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet are inventions of a later age. If, as Bell says, the word *Nâmûs* is of Greek origin meaning Jewish law and if the Prophet (or any one else) had fabricated the story when the alleged initial claim of the Prophet's having seen Allah had been allegedly modified and consequently the angel had been introduced as the conveyer of *waḥy*, he would definitely have used the term angel or Jibrîl in the story instead of the admittedly unfamiliar and, according to the meaning suggested, rather incongruous expression *Nâmûs* in it. Thus, according to Bell's own reasoning, the word *Nâmûs*, since it is used in the tradition, could not, even if Greek in origin, have meant Jewish law; for it is well-known that words of foreign origin change meanings in the process of adoption and naturalization in another language. The very fact of the use of the word in the tradition in question as an expression of Waraqah's is a decisive evidence of the genuineness of the account.

As regards Bell's argument at (i), namely, that 'Â'ishah (r.a.) received the account from the Prophet, it is of course true that she did so. It is also likely that something might have been subsequently given out in her name which she probably had never said. But this probability only calls for a more careful examination of the *isnâd* rather than for treating all traditions emanating from her as suspect. Bell is also wrong in seeking to discredit the story on the ground that *taḥannuth* was not a pre-Islamic Quraysh practice as given out in the version of the report given in Ibn Ishâq's work, nor was fasting, which is said to have accompanied it, introduced till at Madina. Now, without discussing whether fasting was not known in Pre-Islamic Arabia or whether it was introduced in imitation of the Jews, it may be pointed out that 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report about *taḥannuth*, as given in *Bukhârî*, does neither mention that it was a pre-Islamic Quraysh practice nor does it make any allusion to fasting being a necessary part of it. It is also to be noted that the reporters in Ibn Isḥâq's work do not claim to

[1] A. JEFFERY, *The Forign Vocabulary of the Koran*, Baroda, 1938. Bell must have seen the work before its publication, as he had seen Jeffery's other work before its publication.

have received their account from her. Thus Bell's argument here suffers from a dual methodological fault. He seeks to discredit her account in general on the basis of statements that are nowhere claimed to have been made by her; and he bases his conclusion on the statements that he himself acknowledges to have come down on a "far less reliable *isnâd*.".

Again, Bell seems to admit the genuineness of the very first part of 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report as reproduced in Ibn Ishâq's work because, according to Bell, it is found here "in the earliest form". It says, as Bell puts it, "that the Messenger of Allah began by seeing true visions in his sleep; that came to him like the dawn of the morning, and that he began to love solitude."[1] Bell emphasizes that this earliest version does not make her responsible for anything more than that. It is to be noted that Bell is not quite correct in translating the expression *al-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah* here as "true visions". Its correct meaning is "True dreams", for *ru'yâ* in sleep means dreams, not visions. He is also not quite right in translating the expression (جاءت كفلق الصبح *jâ'at ka-falaq al-ṣubḥ*) as "they came like the dawn of the morning". Its correct sense is "they came true like the dawn of the morning". Be that as it may, two things need to be specially noted about this statement. First, it is obviously part of the story, not the whole of it; for 'A'ishah (r.a.) could not have stopped abruptly without indicating what the Prophet did or what happened to him after he had began to love solitude. She must have said something in continuation and completion of the story. Second, whatever the nature of the *ru'yâ* in sleep, there is no hint here at the appearance of any entity before the Prophet at that stage. Nor does Bell seem to take what he translates as "visions" to be the ones which he assumes are "recounted" in the Qur'ânic passage 53:1-18; for if it was a question of only a "vision" in sleep, i.e., dream, no one would have bothered to controvert or discredit it, for anyone can experience any sort of unusual dream in sleep. Clearly the "vision" which is supposed to have caused the controversy leading to its supposed clarification in the passage 53:1-18 must have been different from the dreams (visions) in sleep and it must have taken place before its alleged "recounting" in the above mentioned passage. The question that naturally arises is: How and when did the Prophet have that experience which he gave out to the people and which elicited criticisms, thereby making it necessary for him to "recount" and clarify it in the passage in question. Bell does not of course ask himself this question; but the part of 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report quoted in

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[1] *M.W.*, 1934, p. 14.

Ibn Isḥâq's work and Bell's own theory both indicate that something remains to be said in completion of the story. That something is in fact related in Â'ishah's (r.a.) report which is given in full and correctly in *Bukhârî* but it is given in Ibn Ishaq's work in a different and less reliable form, by a different group of narrators who have at least the honesty of not citing 'Â'ishah (r.a.) as the authority for their version of the account.

While rejecting the story about *taḥannuth* and the Prophet's conversation with Waraqah, Bell does not elsewhere rule out the possibility of the Prophet's contact with the latter and such other people with a knowledge of Christianity and its scripture. Indeed, such contacts are implicit throughout Bell's other thesis, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment.*[1] Be that as it may, even in the present instance he implies that the Prophet had given out his initial experience at the outset of his career; for, if he had not, there would have been no need for "recounting" it. Therefore the question arises: To whom could the Prophet have first disclosed his experience, if not to such persons as his wife Khadîjah (r.a.) and their relative Waraqah who, by all accounts, were the most likely ones to listen to him with sympathy and attention? *Taḥannuth*, the experience at Hirâ' and the subsequent conversation with Waraqah, which are the two most important items in 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report, thus appear to be just in the nature of things and are moreover in accord with Bell's own lines of argument.

III. The assumption of pre-Qur'ân deliverances

As regards the second assumption that prior to his recounting the "visions" in the passage 53:1-18 the Prophet had been "speaking" in "some manner" but had not started delivering or "composing" the Qur'ân , Bell advances three arguments. (i) The word *yanṭiqu* (ينطق) in the passage (*'âyah* 3) "is a general one and is not elsewhere associated with the recitation of the Qur'ân". (ii) The word "Qur'ân" is derived from the Syriac *qeryânâ.* Hence the idea of supplying a Qur'ân "was suggested by the scripture readings of the Christian Church". Therefore the Prophet "had gathered some sort of a congregation before he set about supplying them with "readings". (iii) The word *'awḥâ* used in *'âyah* 4 of the passage does not "necessarily imply the communication of the words of the Qur'ân."[2] Also, the various uses of the word *waḥy* in the Qur'ân show that it means "suggestion", "prompting" or "inspiration".[3]

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[1] London, 1926.

[2] *M.W.*, 1934, p. 146.

Now, the last argument (i. e. iii) relates mainly to the third of Bell's assumptions mentioned above, namely, the nature of *waḥy* in the Qur'ân. Hence this argument will be dealt with along with his assumptions about *waḥy* in general at the end of this chapter. Before that his other arguments and assumptions are discussed one by one.

As regards Bell's argument (i), namely, that initially the Prophet had been only "speaking" in some manner and not delivering the Qur'ân and that he commenced delivering the Qur'ân only when he gathered a sort of a congregation, it is simply a reiteration of Muir's assumption noticed earlier. The faults in that assumption have already been noted.[2] So far as Bell's addition to the argument in this connection is concerned, it may be noted that he puts a very narrow and rather misleading construction on the expression *yanṭiqu* occurring in 53:3, divorcing the word from the whole context of the passage and the situation in which it was given out. The unmistakable purport of the passage is to contradict the unbelievers' objection to the effect that what the Prophet had been giving out to them was not Allah's words but the Prophet's own. In reply to that objection it is stated that the Prophet "does not speak out of his own whim; it is nothing but a divine communication (*waḥy*) delivered (to him)." The expression here is *mâ yanṭiqu* (he does not speak), not simply *yanṭiqu* (he speaks). It is thus just the appropriate phrase in that context. It is not used simply in the general sense of "speaking", as Bell would have us believe, and it does not imply that the Prophet had been "only speaking in some manner". It implies that the Prophet had been claiming his deliverances to be Allah's communications, that the unbelievers' were objecting to that claim and that the passage therefore rebuts that objection by categorically asserting that the Prophet did not speak out of his own mind and imagination – it was no statement of his own, born out of his whims, but *waḥy* (divine communication) delivered to him. Bell totally misconstrues the expression divorcing it from the context of the passage. If the Prophet had not claimed that what he was giving out was Allah's words, the Qur'ân, there would have been no reason for the unbelievers' raising any objection to his claim and therefore no need for a rejoinder to that objection, as the passage in question admittedly is.

Bell is somewhat confusing and self-contradictory in his statement in this connection. He says with regard to the supposedly pre-Qur'ân deliverances that

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[1] *Ibid.*, 147, 148.

[2] *Supra*, pp. 94-97.

waḥy does not mean the verbal communication of the text of a revelation, but it means a 'suggestion', 'prompting' or 'inspiration' coming into a person's mind from outside himself."[1] He further says that the Prophet had, before the delivery of the passage in question, been only speaking "by *waḥy*, by suggestion from a heavenly person" whom he had seen.[2] Obviously Bell makes these statements to avoid the implication of the assertion in the passage that what the Prophet was giving out was not his speech but *waḥy* delivered to him. Bell is thus forced to give an interpretation of the term *waḥy* in relation to what he calls pre-Qur'ân deliverances. But this interpretation of Bell's in effect eliminates the distinction between what is called the pre-Qur'ân deliverances and the deliverances constituting the Qur'ân. Bell is thus both confusing and self-contradictory. He himself in effect nullifies his assumption of pre-Qur'ân deliverances by the Prophet.

As regards Bell's other assumption that the Prophet got the idea of delivering a Qur'ân (reading) from the scripture readings in the Christian church and that he thought of producing such "readings" only when he had already gathered a sort of a congregation round him, it is simply an absurd proposition inspired obviously by the similarly absurd assumption of Muir's that by his pre-*waḥy* or pre-Qur'ân utterances the Prophet had already gathered a band of followers when he thought of standing forth as a Prophet and speaking in the name of God.[3] And the same objections apply in Bell's case as well. It is simply unreasonable to think that any group of persons would become the Prophet's followers unless they were convinced of the truth of his position as a divinely commissioned teacher and of his utterances in relation to his teachings as divine communications. Moreover, if the Prophet got the idea of congregational "readings" from the scripture readings in the Christian church, it does not necessarily follow that he waited till he gathered a band round him. Intelligent and careful as he was by all accounts, he would have started his mission by having a set of readings ready at hand!

Lastly, Bell's statement that prior to his "recounting" of the "vision" in the passage 53:1-18 the Prophet had been only speaking in some manner implies that the passage 53:1-18 is the earliest and the first passage that was revealed of the Qur'ân. That proposition, however, is simply wrong. It is neither supported by the sources, in spite of differences in the reports regarding the order of

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[1] *M.W.*, 1934, p. 148.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Supra*, pp. 94-97.

revelations, nor is it admitted by the orientalists themselves. Even Bell does not appear to strictly hold that view; and he in effect contradicts himself a little earlier when he says: "If Mohammed was commissioned to produce a Koran (recitation), then the command *'iqra'* (recite) would naturally come first. This argument may even now appeal to a critical mind, and indeed most European scholars have accepted the passage as the earliest."[1] Thus does Bell in effect say that before the delivery of the passage 53:1-18 the *'iqra'* passage of the Qur'ân had been revealed. Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had thus not just been speaking in some manner, but delivering the Qur'ân before the so-called "recounting" of the "vision" in 53:1-18.

IV. Bell's Assumption About the Vision of God

As regards Bell's assumption that in the passage 53:1-18 (*sûrat al-Najm*) the Prophet initially claimed to have seen Allah, it is an elaboration of Margoliouth's assumption and is based totally upon a wrong interpretation of the passage. The meaning and implication of the passage have been noted earlier.[2] Here Bell's arguments and observations are taken into consideration.

Bell translates *'ayah* 4 of the passage (*'allamahu shadîd al-quwa*) as: "There taught him (or it) one strong in power." The plain translation of the *'âyah* should be: "One strong in power taught him." There is nothing in the *'âyah* to warrant the insertion of the word "there" at the beginning of the sentence; for the description of what he calls the "vision" come after two more *'âyahs*, i.e., in *'âyah*s 7-9. Bell's main argument, however, centres round *'âyah* 10 of the passage which runs as: *fa 'awḥâ 'ilâ 'abdihi mâ 'awḥâ*. He rejects what he calls the Muslim commentators' view that the subject of the verb *'awhâ* is Jibrîl while the pronoun in *'abdihi* is Allah, saying that it is an unnatural use of language. He admits that Allah is indeed the pronoun in *'abdihi* and then says that "this involves that Allah is also the subject of the verb and in fact is being spoken of all through."[3]

It needs only to be pointed out here that unlike in English, in Arabic pronouns do not always relate to the immediate antecedent, nor is the same subject assumed in the cases of all the verbs in a single sentence. Instances of such use of pronouns are abundant even in modern Arabic. Even in English this particular grammatical rule is not always strictly observed and the meaning of an expression can be properly understood only with reference to the context and with a

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[1] *M.W.*, 1934, p.17.
[2] *Supra*, 106-110.
[3] *M.W.*, 1034, 148-149.

background knowledge of the facts.[1] So far as Arabic is concerned, however, there would be no unnatural use of language if there is one pronoun for the verb *'awḥâ* in the *'âyah* in question and another pronoun for the expression *'abdihi* in it. There are many instances in the Qur'ân of such use of different implied pronouns in different verbs in a single sentence.

In fact the nature of the entity spoken of should be understood primarily on the basis of its description in *'âyahs* 5-9, and not so much on the basis of *'âyah* 10 alone. It is described in *'âyahs* 5-6 as "one strong in power" and "endowed with wisdom (or mental and physical fitness)". Bell himself acknowledges that the term *mirrah* in *'ayah* 6 is taken to mean fitness either of figure or of intellect.[2] These adjectives are clearly relative in nature and can by no stretch of the imagination be taken as attributes of Allah. Nowhere in the Qur'ân is God described in such terms and by such attributes. On the other hand, angels are described, among others, by the adjective *shadîd* and its plural *shidâd*.[3] Thus, even if the traditions on the subject are not brought in to bear on the passage, its internal evidence decisively militates against any assumption that the entity spoken of is Allah. On the contrary, keeping the descriptive phrases in mind and relating this description to *'âyah* 18 of the same *sûrah* which speaks of what is seen as "one of the greatest signs of his Lord", and not the Lord Himself, the unavoidable meaning is that the entity spoken of is the angel. This is further clear from the Qur'ânic passage 81:19-27 which should be taken into consideration in this connection and which speaks of the entity as a "noble messenger", besides describing him as one "possessing power" (*dhî quwwah*). Bell of course suggests that *'âyah* 18 of *surat al-Najm* and the passage 81:19-27, and the angel Jibrîl, are all subsequent introductions. But the grounds on which these assumptions are made, as will be seen presently, are all untenable.

Bell seeks to support his assumption by suggesting that the Prophet, having claimed that he had seen Allah, subsequently realized the mistake and also faced objections to it. As evidence of this supposed "uneasiness" and "objections" Bell cites 17:60[62] which reads, in Bell's translation: "We appointed the vision which We showed thee simply as a test for the people."Bell argues that this *'âyah* refers

[1] See for instance this statement: "Perhaps his [Al-Zubayr's] relationship to Khadîjah through his father and to Muhammad through his mother made conversion easy." (Watt, *M. at M.*, 92) One not knowing the facts might take the last "his" in the sentence to refer to the immediate antecedent, Muḥammad (p.b.h.), and the "mother" spoken of to be his rather than Al-Zubayr's, but it is the latter which is meant here.

[2] *M.W.*, 1934, p. 145, n.4.

[3] Q. 66:6 and 72:8.

not to *isrâ'* and *mi'râj* alluded to in 17:1, as the Muslim commentators hold, but to the "vision" narrated in *sûrat al-Najm;* for, according to him, 17:1 does not speak of any "vision".[1] This argument of Bell's is, however, not at all tenable; for 17:1 *does* speak of a vision and also qualifies it as a vision of some of the "signs" of Allah - *li nuriyahu min 'âyâtinâ* - "in order that We might show him some of Our signs". Thus, the very argument on which Bell builds up his assumption of "uneasiness" and "objections" about the "vision" in *sûrat al-Najm* is wrong.

Proceeding on the basis of these two faulty assumptions, namely, that in *sûrat al-Najm* the Prophet first claimed to have seen Allah and that there was "uneasiness" and "objections" about that claim, Bell suggests that the Prophet therefore subsequently modified his position; and this modification is noticeable in *'âyahs* 11-18 of the *sûrah.* Bell translates its *'âyah* 11 - *mâ kadhaba al-fu'âd mâ ra'â* - as: "The heart did not falsify what it saw", and says that the Prophet thus attempted to give the impression of a "spiritual appearance"[2].

Here again Bell makes a mistake about pronouns. The pronoun implicit in the verb *mâ ra'â* is the Prophet, not "it", i.e., the heart; for the simple reason that it does not make sense to say that the heart did not falsify, i.e., invent the vision, if the intention was to stress that it was only a mental vision. On the contrary, since the "vision" was very much corporeal it was emphasized that the heart did not "falsify" it, i.e., it was no mistaken impression, no mere imagination, no hallucination on his part about what he saw. Far from mystifying the "vision", the statement here only emphasizes the reality of the experience. The pronoun in *mâ ra'â* is thus the Prophet. That the experience was one of physical sight is indicated again in *'âyah* 13 which speaks of its happening at another "descent" and, further, in *'âyah* 17 which specifically mentions *baṣar,* i.e., eye, as the instrument of the sight. Had the intention been to mystify and modify, neither the expression "another descent" nor *baṣar* would have been mentioned in connection with the so-called modifying statements. The alleged modification is totally groundless and the *'âyahs* 13, 17, and 18 do not at all modify anything.

Moreover, as already pointed out, the passage 53:1-18 should be interpreted in connection with 81:19-27 (*sûrat al-Takwîr*) which speaks of an "honourable messenger", i.e., an angel, as the conveyer of *waḥy.* Bell suggests that this passage should not be allowed to influence the interpretation of 53:1-18. His reasons for this suggestion are: (a) that it is not until the Madinan period that Jibrîl is

[1] *M.W.,* 1934, p.151.
[2] *Ibid.*

mentioned in this connection and (b) that when the Makkan unbelievers raised the objection, in Bell's words, "that an angel should have been sent as messenger or that at least an angel should have been conjoined with him", the Prophet's reply was "not that an angel was actually conveying the message to him, but simply that all former messengers had been men, xvi:45, or that if an angel had been sent, that would have been the end of the matter, and there would have been no respite, vi:8."[1] Bell further states that the "whole new world" of angels "opened up" to the Prophet much subsequently – "note the phrase in xxv:1, 'He addeth in the creation what He pleaseth' as indicating that the creatures there spoken of were new to Muhammad."[2] Thus arguing, Bell concludes that "the angel messenger of surah lxxxi must be later than the description of the visions in surah liii, and should not be allowed to influence its interpretation."[3]

Now, Bell is very much wrong in all his assumptions here, namely, (a) that the Prophet became aware of the existence of angels at a later date than his utterance of *sûrat al-Najm*; (b) the assumption about the nature of the Makkan unbelievers' demand for an angel messenger and (c) the assumption that Jibrîl was mentioned as conveyer of *waḥy* only at Madina.

As regards the first assumption it is decisively disproved by the very argument which Bell himself adduces to support his thesis. The fact that the Makkans asked for an angel messenger or an angel coadjutor with the Prophet shows that the Makkan unbelievers, not to speak of the Prophet himself, were very much aware of the existence of angels. In fact, at three places in *sûrat al-Najm* itself the unbelievers' misconception about angels are corrected. Thus *'âyah* 21 points out their mistake in thinking that angels are Allah's daughters.[4] *'Âyah* 26 says that there are indeed many angels in the heaven but their intercession would be of no avail to anyone except with Allah's leave and pleasure;[5] and *'âyah* 27 states that "those who believe not in the hereafter name the angels with female names.[6] There are a large number of early Makkan passages in the Qur'ân showing that knowledge about the existence of angels had been fairly common in Arabia, particularly at Makka, since pre-Islamic times.[7] Hence, nothing could be farther

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1 *M.W.*, 1934, p. 149.
2 *Ibid.*, 154.
3 *Ibid.*, p.150.
4 The text runs thus: ألكم الذكر و له الأنثى
5 The text runs thus: و كم من ملك في السماوات لا تغني شفاعتهم شيئا الا من بعد أن يأذن الله لمن يشاء ويرضى
6 The text runs thus: ان الذين لا يومنون بالآخرة ليسمون الملائكة تسمية الأنثى
7 See for instance Q. 69:17; 70:4; 74:31; 89:22 and 97:4 out of some fifty such passages.

from the truth and more misleading than the assertion that the existence of angels dawned on Muhammad (p.b.h.) at a later stage of his career.

Similarly Bell misconstrues the passages 16:45 and 6:8 which relate to the unbelievers' demand for an angel to be sent as messenger to them and the replies given to that demand. It should be noted that these two are not the only passages in the Qur'ân dealing with the matter. There are at least ten more such passages relating to it.[1] These passages do in no way suggest that the Prophet was avoiding the question whether there were angels or not, nor whether an angel had brought to him Allah's word. A cursory glance at these passages would make it unmistakably clear that the unbelievers' demand arose out of a two-fold attitude on their part. They refused to believe that a human being like themselves could have been a messenger of Allah. They also sought to discredit the Prophet by saying in effect that if indeed an angel had delivered Allah's word to him, why not an angel instead was sent to them as His messenger or at least as a co-warner with him. It may also be noted that the Makkan unbelievers could not by themselves have conceived the idea of an angel messenger being sent to them; for , hitherto they only imagined that angels were Allah's daughters and that their primary function, as Allah's favoured ones, was to intercede with Him on behalf of human beings. The idea that an angel could be sent as Allah's messenger therefore appears to have dawned on them only when the Prophet had made the claim that an angel had actually delivered to him Allah's words. At any rate, their demand was clearly a counter-claim arising out of what the Prophet had asserted.

The nature of the unbelievers' objection and challenge may be gleaned from 15:6-7 (*sûrat al-Ḥijr*) and 25:7 (*sûrat al-Furqân*). They run respectively as follows:

و قالوا يا أيها الذي نزل عليه الذكر انك لمجنون. لو ما تأتينا بالملائكة ان كنت من الصادقين.

"And they say: 'O the one on whom the text has been sent down! Truly you are mad. Why not bring to us the angels, if you are of the truthful?" (15:6-7)

و قالوا ما لهذا الرجل يأكل الطعام و يمشي في الأسواق لو لا أنزل اليه ملك فيكون معه نذيرا

"And they say: 'What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to be a warner along with him?" (25:7)

While the second passage shows that the unbelievers could not persuade themselves that a human being could be Allah's messenger, the first passage illustrates the retorting nature of their demand. The form of the unbelievers' address in the first passage, "O the one on whom the text has been sent down", is very significant. It in no way suggests that they believed in it. It is only a taunting

[1] See for instance Q. 6:111; 6:158; 15:7-8; 16:33; 17:95; 23:24; 25:7; 25:21-22; 41:14; 43:53.

repetition of what they were told, namely, that Allah's word had been "sent down" to him.[1] The phrase *nujjila* (has been sent down) implies that some intermediary had been mentioned as the conveyer of the text. This is further clear from the succeeding *'âyah* 15:7 which demands of the Prophet to produce the angels if he was "truthful", that is, if he had spoken the truth in stating that an angel had delivered to him the divine text. The form of the Prophet's claim is discernible from the nature of the retort itself. Surely the unbelievers could not have asked for the angels to be produced before them if the Prophet had stated to them that he had received the text directly from Allah. Thus the very question which Bell raises and the Qur'ânic passages relating to them decisively disprove both the assumptions that the Prophet had initially claimed to have received the text directly from Allah and that he became aware of the existence of angels only at a subsequent stage of his career.

Again, while noticing two of the replies given to the unbelievers' demand, Bell does not mention the other very pertinent reply stated in the *'âyah* immediately following the one he cites, namely, 6:9. This *'âyah* points out that were an angel sent to them he would still have been sent in the form of a human being and in that case they would have been in no less confusion. The folly in their demand is further pointed out in 17:95 where it is stated that had the earth been inhabited by angels walking about there in peace and quietness, certainly an angel would have been sent as a messenger. In all these passages the objection which is being combated is not whether angels did exist or not but, if an angel did really deliver Allah's word to Muḥammad (p.b.h.), why did one not physically appear before them as Allah's messenger or at least as co-messenger with him? In other words, why did Muḥammad (p.b.h.) not ask the angel to come up to vouchsafe for him before his people?

Thus, the suggestion that the Prophet had initially claimed to have seen Allah because he was unaware of the existence of angels at that stage of his career and because the passage 53:1-18 contains indications of such a "vision" and its subsequent "modifications" is totally unwarranted and untenable. Before leaving this particular assumption, however, one more item in Bell's argument may be noted. While maintaining that the traditions regarding the coming of *waḥy* are later inventions Bell at the same time does not refrain from invoking Jâbir ibn 'Abd Allah's report on the subject given in *Bukhârî*[2] to support his assumption.

[1] See also Q. 38:8 which says: أأنزل عليه الذكر من بيننا – "What! has the récit been sent down to him of all of us?"

[2] *Bukhârî*, nos. 4992-4995.

He says that Jâbir's report implies "that the vision was one of Allah", adding that as it is "contrary to orthodox sentiment", it "must have come into existence before orthodox tradition was fixed."[1] Bell says so on the basis of the expression: *Fa-'idhâ huwa jâlis 'alâ kursîy* occurring in the report. He translates this expression as : "and there He was sitting upon the Throne" and argues that the "throne" is "appropriate" to Allah.[2]

Now, it needs to be pointed out only that the word *kursîy* is in the indefinite form in the report in question, meaning "a chair", and not in the definite form meaning "the Throne", as Bell mistranslates it. There is thus no question of its being exclusively "appropriate" to Allah. It may further be noted that in two of the versions of the same report in *Bukhârî* (i.e. nos. 4994 and 4995) it is specifically mentioned that the entity seen was "the very angel who had come to me at Ḥirâ'" (*Fa 'idhâ al-malak alladî jâ'anî bi-Ḥirâ'*). Bell is of course aware of this fact; but he attempts to explain it away by saying that Jibrîl was imported into the story "fairly early."[3] This is an unwarranted statement. He does not even explain what he means by "fairly early". Does he mean to say that it had happened before this specific version of Jâbir's report came into existence? But even that would not resolve all the difficulty; for Jâbir was an'*anṣârî* (helper, d. 74 H.) and came into contact with the Prophet after his migration to Madina. Jâbir also specifically states that he received his information from the Prophet himself. Now, as Bell says that the Prophet had modified his initial account of the "vision" in view of the objections to it, which obviously took place at Makka, he could not have given an impression of having seen Allah to Jâbir after having migrated to Madina. In fact none of the versions of Jâbir's report implies that the "vision" was one of Allah. Also Bell's statements that the so-called "orthodox tradition" had been formed after Jâbir's report had come into existence and that Jibrîl was introduced "fairly early" in the story are somewhat self-contradictory and confusing; for, according to Bell's own assumption the Prophet had supposedly modified his position before the migration. Hence there was no question of the so-called "orthodox tradition" having been formed subsequently to the coming into existence of Jâbir's account. All the four forms of Jâbir's report, taken together, clearly show that the entity seen was an angel, Jibrîl, not Allah.

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1 *M.W.*., 1934, 17-18.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid. 18.*

V. The assumption about Jibrîl

Bell's fifth assumption, namely, that the passage 81:19-27 which speaks of a "noble messenger" as the conveyer of *waḥy* was given out by the Prophet at a later stage of his career and therefore it should not be allowed to influence the interpretation of 53:1-18, has already been shown to be wrong; for the two props on which this assumption is made to stand, namely, that the Prophet was not initially aware of the existence of angels and that he avoided telling the unbelievers that an angel had delivered to him Allah's words are totally wrong. The passage 81:19-27 should therefore be taken into consideration in interpreting the passage 53:1-18.

This brings us to the last item in the series of Bell's assumptions, namely, that Jibrîl was introduced as the conveyer of *waḥy* only at Madina. Now, it has been seen:

(1) that angels had been known to the Prophet and his contemporaries at Makka at least since the beginning of his mission;

(2) that they were spoken of as messengers between Allah and His Prophets;

(3) that it was specifically stated at Makka that a "noble messenger" had brought the divine text to the Prophet;

(4) that it was because of this claim that the Makkan unbelievers came forward with the counter-claim that an angel should have been sent as a messenger or joined as co-messenger with Muhammad (p.b.h.);

(5) that the traditions relating to the coming of *waḥy* and specifically mentioning Jibrîl as its conveyer are not later fabrications, as Bell supposes; and

(6) that even the Christians at Makka and elsewhere in Arabia believed and knew that Jibrîl was the angel who conveyed Allah's revelation to His Prophets.

In view of all these proven facts it is just not reasonable to suppose that Jibrîl came to be known to the Prophet only after he had come over to Madina.

True, Jibrîl is mentioned by that very name only three times in the Qur'ân and all these are Madinan passages, namely, 2:97, 2:98 and 66:4. Of these, it is only in 2:97 where that angel is spoken of as the conveyer of *waḥy*. The wording of the passage clearly shows that it is a reply to objections raised about Jibrîl in some quarters and that some talk had already been going on before this *'âyah* was given out. In fact, all the reports regarding the occasion of revelation of this passage agree in stating that when the Jews at Madina came to know that the Prophet claimed that the angel Jibrîl brought revelations to him they expressed their

antipathy towards that angel and said that had the Prophet said that the angel Mikhael was the conveyer of *waḥy* they would have followed him (the Prophet). Thereupon this passage was revealed in reply to their objection.[1] The passage itself and its context as known from the reports do not in any way indicate that Jibrîl was being spoken of here for the first time as the conveyer of revelations.

Moreover, the fact that Jibrîl is spoken of by that very name in the Madinan passages only does not mean that there is no reference to him in the Makkan *sûrahs*. In fact, the expression *rasûl karîm* (a noble messenger) in 81:19 and *shadîd al-quwa* (one strong in power) in 53:3 are taken by all commentators to mean the angel Jibrîl. It would even seem that the expression *shadîd al-quwa* and the term Jibrîl are coterminous; for, according to one authority, Jibrîl is a compound word made up of *Jabr* and *Il*, meaning a "brave one of God" or "servant of God". *Jabr* in Hebrew is *Geber* which means "a servant", and *Il* means "the mighty", "the powerful".[2] Also the expression *Rûḥ al-Quds* (the spirit of holiness)[3] in 16:102 and *al-Rûḥ al-'Amîn* (the trustworthy spirit) in 26:102 are unanimously taken by the commentators to refer to Jibrîl. It may also be noted that the term *Nâmûs* occurring in the tradition means the trusted or the confidential angel.[4] Thus, both the Qur'ân and the traditions, which should not be kept out of consideration, show that Jibrîl was mentioned as conveyer of *waḥy* from the very beginning of the Prophet's mission.

VI. Bell's Concept of *Waḥy*

This brings us to Bell's assumptions about the nature and implications of *waḥy*. He points out some of the various senses in which the term *waḥy* and its derivatives are used in the Qur'ân and on that basis asserts that the general meaning of the word is "suggestion", "prompting" or "inspiration". He then cites some of the instances of *waḥy* where Allah gave directive to His Prophets to do some particular things, such as to Nûḥ to build the ark, to Mûsâ to set out with his people by night and to strike the rock with his staff and to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) to follow the religion of Ibrâhîm. On the basis of such instances Bell concludes that *waḥy* means God's suggestions or promptings to His Prophets "for a practical line of conduct."[5]

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[1] See for instance Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, II, 36 and Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr*, I, 185-191.

[2] William Geseneus, *Hebrew English Lexicon*, cited in Malik Ghulam Farid, *The Holy Qurâan English Translation and Commentary*, Rabwah (Pakistan), 1969, p. 46, n.123.

[3] Not "Holy Spirit", for the construction is *muḍâf-muḍâf 'ilayhi*, not *ṣifât-mawṣûf*.

[4] See the term in the *Lisân al-'Arab*.

Now, before taking up the meaning of *waḥy* in general and of Qur'ânic *waḥy* in particular, some general faults in Bell's analysis may be pointed out. To begin with, when he argues that *waḥy* in general and of Qur'ânic *waḥy* in particular, some general faults in Bell's analysis may be pointed out. To begin with, when he argues that *waḥy* means suggestions for a practical line of conduct, Bell does not go the whole way and does not explain how the suggestion or prompting, as he prefers to call it, could have been communicated to the Prophet. Also, if he had not been too inclined to use the terms "suggestions" and "prompting" he would have easily seen that the instances he cites are clearly God's "commands" and directives to His Prophets, and not merely suggestions. These commands and directives for the practical conduct, it may be pointed out, constitute God's words. The command *'iqra'*, which Bell admits to be the earliest passage of the Qur'ân, is God's word.

Bell seems to acknowledge this fact when he says that the "practical suggestions are indeed often formulated in direct speech" and that there are "cases in which the formula has reference to doctrine rather than to conduct."[2] Yet, he insists that these formulations are "always quite short, the sort of phrase... which might flash into a person's mind after a consideration of a question, as the summing up of the matter."[3] One may only remark here that if in the ultimate analysis *waḥy* means "the sort of phrase" which flashes into one's mind after consideration of a question as the decision and summing up of the matter, then there is no need for importing God or any external being into the scene and no sense in adding, as Bell does a few lines further on, that *waḥy* means "suggestion", "prompting" or "inspiration" which comes into a person's mind apparently from outside himself.[4] The fact is that *waḥy*, in its technical sense, does not mean suggestion, prompting or inspiration, nor a person's intuition and conclusion after consideration of a matter, but divine communication to His Prophets and Messengers.

Continuing his analysis Bell says that *waḥy* means, "at any rate in the early portions of the Qur'ân", not that it had been conveyed to the Prophet verbally, but "that the idea of composing a Qur'ân" had been "suggested" to him. Bell next states that as the Prophet's "theory of revelation developed" he "extended the signification of the word to cover the communication of long passages in verbal

[1] *Ibid.*, 147.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, 148.

form"; for "there are some passages in which this would be *the natural implication*", such as 11:40, 12:102. 18:27 and 20:45.[1] Thus would Bell appear to suggest that parts of the Qur'ân are God's verbal communications and parts are not so. But he would not really commit himself to that position; for having made the above statement he attempts to neutralize its effect by saying that the passages referred to "are probably fairly late, and in all of them it would be at least possible to avoid giving the word the sense of actual verbal communication."[2] Clearly, Bell here betrays his ultimate intention to "avoid", by any means, "giving the word the sense of actual verbal communication". One may only observe that it is of course *possible* to twist and "avoid" that sense, but that is "their natural implication", as Bell admits, perhaps unguardedly.

It may also be noted in this connection that whenever a Qur'ânic passage runs counter to his assumption Bell attempts to assign it a late date or an earlier one, as it suits his purpose. The passages cited are all Makkan. Even if for argument's sake it is admitted that they are "probably fairly late", Bell does not appear consistent in his assertion that as the Prophet's theory of revelation developed he extended the signification of the word to cover verbal communication. For having said so he cites 42:50 (in fact 42:51) which says: "It is not for man that Allah speaks to him except by *waḥy*, or from behind a veil or He sends a messenger who communicates by His order what He wills..."[3] And a little further on he states that in this passage "one almost sees Muhammad's conception of how the revelation came to him, growing before our eyes..."[4] Thus Bell would have us believe in the same breath that as the Prophet's conception of *waḥy* developed he extended its meaning to cover verbal communication, and that at the same time he said that *waḥy* could not be verbal communication! The fact is that neither was the Prophet nor is the Qur'ân so inconsistent. It is Bell himself who has misunderstood the sense of *waḥy* as given by the Qur'ân. He has also misunderstood the meaning of the passage 12:51. It does in no way mean that *waḥy* cannot be verbal communication; it merely describes the *manner and methods* of communicating Allah's words to man. It would seem that as the passage says that Allah does not speak to man directly, i.e., face to face, Bell takes *wahy* to means Allah's "indirect speech" in the English grammatical sense!

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[1] *Ibid.* The italicization is mine.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] The passage runs as follows:... و ما كان لبشر أن يكلمه الله الا وحيا أو من وراء حجاب أو يرسل رسولا فيوحي باذنه ما يشاء ...

[4] *M.W.*., 1934, p. 148.

That Bell puts that English grammatical sense of "indirect speech" is further clear from what he observes next, saying that the passage 42:51 is a confession that the "direct speech of Allah in some of the Qur'ânic passages where He speaks "in His proper person in the first person singular" is wrong. Bell writes: "There are still one or two passages in the Qur'ân in which Allah is made to speak in His own proper person in the first person singular; c.f. li:56-58, lxxiv:11-15. If this direct speech of Allah to the Prophet was wrong, as the above passage seems to confess, how much more the claim to have actually seen Him."[1]

It should at once be pointed out that the passage 42:51 does not say that *waḥy* cannot be verbal communication; it does not confess that the statements in the Qur'ân in "direct speech" of Allah (in the English grammatical sense) is wrong. Bell's assumption throughout that the Qur'ân is the Prophet's own composition is wrong and it *is* the point at issue. Not only the "one or two passages" cited above by Bell, nor even those admitted by Bell to imply verbal communication, but the entire Qur'ân, whether a passage is formulated in "direct speech" or in "indirect speech", is verbal communication of Allah's words. Also the assumption that the Prophet initially claimed to have seen Allah is wrong. It remains to see what actually is the signification of *waḥy* glimpsed from the Qur'ân itself and how and where Bell has erred in thinking that *waḥy* means "suggestion" or "inspiration".

To anyone who has a knowledge of the Qur'ân it should be obvious that Bell's survey of the Qur'ânic use of the word *waḥy* is not at all comprehensive, nor even objective. He has selected only such passages as he thinks would support his view that the word does not mean verbal communication of a text; for that is what he confessedly intends to "avoid" even where that sense is the "natural" one. Even then, the meanings he puts on the word do not appear to be adequate or appropriate in respect of all the instances he has cited. Thus, in the instances of *waḥy* to the Prophets for what he calls practical lines of conduct the meaning of the term should be, as pointed out earlier, command or directive and not simply suggestion or prompting as such. Again, the *'iqra'* passage, where of course the term *waḥy* does not occur but which Bell himself acknowledges to be part of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, is a command, and not suggestion. More specifically, the *waḥy* to be given to the earth on the doomsday will not be a suggestion or prompting. Bell in fact commits a mistake in saying that the earth would be prompted to give up its dead – the meaning of the *'âyahs* 99:4-5 is: "On that day she shall speak out her

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[1] *Ibid.*

affairs, because your Lord will *waḥy* her." Clearly the sense here is that Allah will command the earth, together with giving her the speaking power, to speak out her affairs. *Waḥy* here bears this dual sense; for every one knows that the earth as it is at present has no speaking power, and no simple suggestion or prompting will make her speak. To give just one instance outside Bell's survey. "That is some of the tidings of things unseen which We *waḥy* to you", so runs 3:44.[1] Here the term *waḥy* clearly means the communication of some unseen (unknown) affair, and not at all suggestion or inspiration about some unknown affair. Thus the meanings suggested by Bell do not appropriately and adequately convey the sense of the term even in respect of the instances he has cited. If indeed a common English equivalent for *waḥy* must needs be found out, it should be "communication", rather than suggestion, prompting, etc. This expression would probably fit in all the situations.

Since the word *waḥy* is used in various senses in connection with different subjects and situations the proper course in understanding the sense of the term in relation to any particular subject is to examine the uses made of it in connection only with that subject. It is on that basis that in Islamic religious parlance the term *waḥy* is applied to Allah's communications to His Prophets and Messengers. In other words, the *technical* meaning of *waḥy*, apart from its general meanings, is Allah's communications to His Prophets and Messengers. And just like the English word 'communication', *waḥy* means both the act or process of communicating (i.e. as verb) and also that which is communicated (i.e., the subject matter). As such *waḥy* may be of various types in accordance with the manners or processes of its communication, as well as in accordance with the nature of the subject which is communicated.

The passage 42:51 noticed above speaks about the manners or processes of the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophets. The *'âyah* mentions three ways in which Allah's words are made to reach His chosen man, namely, (a) by means of *waḥy*, (b) from behind the veil and (c) by sending a messenger (the angel Jibrîl) who "by His order communicates (*yûḥî*) what He wills". It may be observed that the nature of the first category is not further elaborated here. Obviously it includes all the various processes besides the other two. An example of the second category is the famous incident of Allah's speaking to Mûsâ while remaining unseen. The third type is self-explanatory and is mentioned also in the New Testament.

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[1] The text runs as:....ذلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيه اليك See also Q. 12:102.

Similarly *waḥy* may be of different types depending on the nature of the matter communicated. And of such various types according to subject-matter only one particular type of *waḥy* forms the scripture, the Book or Recitation (Qur'ân). Thus, when Mûsâ was commanded to follow what is called a practical line of conduct, such as striking the rock with his staff, that was of course *waḥy*, but not the *Torâh*. Only that which was specifically communicated as *Torâh* was *Torâh*. Likewise, of the various types of *waḥy* made to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) only that which was communicated as Qur'ân is Qur'ân. And only this type is to be called the Qur'ânic *waḥy*. Hence, while each and every word of the Qur'ân is undoubtedly *waḥy*, each and every *waḥy* to Muḥammad is not the Qur'ân. There are many examples of non-Qur'ânic *waḥy* to him, such as *ḥadîth qudsî*, the information given him in dream about the nature of the place of his migration, etc.

It should be clear from the above that to understand the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy* it is necessary to concentrate our attention upon such passages of the Qur'ân as speak of its communication to the Prophet, and not upon all the passages where the term *waḥy* occurs in its general sense. If we did so, it would be seen that there are a number of such passages which, while speaking about the delivery of the Qur'ân to the Prophet, also use the specific term *waḥy*. There are, however, a large number of passages which very much speak about the coming of the Qur'ân to the Prophet but which do not employ the term *waḥy*. In fact, it is this latter group of passages that contain more significant expressions elucidating the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy*.

There are some forty passages in the Qur'ân wherein the term *waḥy* occurs in connection with its coming to the Prophet. While in the majority of such passages there is no particular indication of the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy*, there are at least a dozen of them that contain expressions explaining its nature. An examination of these passages yields the following facts:

(1) The Qur'ânic *waḥy* itself, and not anything else, which is to be recited/read out. Thus 13:30 states:

كذلك أرسلناك في أمة قد خلت من قبلها أمم لتتلوا عليهم الذي أوحينا اليك ...

"Thus have We sent you (as Messenger) among a people before whom (other) peoples have passed away, in order that *you recite unto them that which We have waḥy-ied to you* ...".

Here the clear implication is, it is that type of *waḥy* which is to be read out. That means, it is in the form of a readable text and not simply a suggestion which is to be worked out and presented in the form of a reading material. And it is precisely

because this type of *waḥy* is to be recited and read out, its other name is Qur'ân, the Reading or Recitation.

(2) It is a scripture (Book) which is *waḥy*-ied and which is to be recited. Thus, 18:27 states:

واتل ما أوحي اليك من كتاب ربك لا مبدل لكلماته ...

"And recite what I *waḥy* to you of the Book of your Lord. No one can change His words..."
Similarly 29:45 states:

اتل ما أوحي اليك من الكتاب...

"Recite what I *waḥy* to you of the Book...."

Again, 35:31 states:

والذي أوحينا اليك من الكتاب هو الحق ....

"And that which I have *waḥy*-ied to you of the Book is the truth...."

Thus, what was communicated (*waḥy*-ied) to the Prophet was a Book, not that it was suggested to him to produce a Book. It is also noteworthy that the first passage in this series speaks of the Qur'ânic *waḥy* as Allah's "words" (*kalimâtihi*), emphasizing that there is none to change *His words*.

(3) That which was *waḥy*-ied is a "Recitation - Qur'ân", and in a specific language. Thus, 42:7 states:

و كذلك أوحينا اليك قرءانا عربيا ...

"Thus have We *waḥy*-ied to you a Qur'ân (Recitation) in Arabic.

The same fact is stressed 12:2 where the term *'anjalnâ* (We have sent down), instead of *'awḥaynâ* (We have communicated) is used. Thus , it is a "Recitation" which had been *waḥy*-ied to the Prophet, not that he was *waḥy*-ied to produce a recitation.

(4) That the Prophet was first to listen to what was being *waḥy*-ied to him, and not to hasten to repeating/reciting it before the completion of its communication. Thus 20:114 states:

و لا تجعل بالقرءان من قبل أن يقضى اليك وحيه ...

"And be not in haste with the Qur'ân (Recitation) before its *waḥy*-ing is completed."

(5) That the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, and not simply the Qur'ân as such, consists of narrations/accounts. 12:3 thus states:

نحن نقص عليك أحسن القصص بما أوحينا اليك هذا القرءان...

"We narrate unto you the best of narratives as we *waḥy* to you this Qur'an."

Here "the best of narratives" is a description of the *waḥy* which is communicated as Qur'ân. Indeed the verbs *naquṣṣu* (We narrate) and *'awḥaynâ* (We *waḥy*) used in the passage are more or less coterminous.

(6) To the same effect are the passages that say that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* itself, not simply the Qur'ân as such, consists of tidings/reports of events and affairs. Thus 11:49 states:

تلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيه اليك ...

"Those are the tidings of the unseen that We *waḥy* to you..."

Similarly 12:102 states:

ذلك من أنباء الغيب نوحيه اليك ...

"That is one of the tidings of the unseen which We *waḥy* to you..."

(7) Last but not least, it is specifically stressed that the Qur'ân is no composition of the Prophet himself and that nothing could be a graver sin on his part than to give out as Allah's words that which was not actually communicated to him as such. 6:93 states this very emphatically as follows:

و من أظلم من من افترى على الله كذبا أو قال أوحي الي و لم يوحى اليه شيء و من قال سأنزل مثل ما أنزل الله...

"And who could be a worse transgressor than the one who forges a lie against Allah or claims: 'It has been *waḥy*-ied to me', while nothing has been *waḥy*-ied to him, and the one who says: 'I shall bring down the like of what Allah has sent down ...?"

In the passages cited above the word *waḥy* has not been translated but left as it is, with the suffixes 'ied' or 'ing' to indicate the tense in English. The meaning should be clear from the context of the sentence. It should also be clear from the above mentioned passages that it is a description of the Qur'ânic *waḥy* itself that (a) it is some specific text which is to be recited,; (b) that it is the Book which is communicated and which is Allah's words (*kalimâtihi*); (c) that it is communicated in Arabic language; (d) that the Prophet is to listen to it carefully before hastening to repeat it; (e) that sometimes it consists of "narratives" and "reports" and (f) that it is no composition of the Prophet himself and that nothing could be a graver sin on his part than to compose a text and then give it out as one from Allah. All these facts unmistakably emphasize textual and verbal communication and not at all communication of ideas or thoughts nor what is called "suggestion, "prompting", "inspiration", "intuition", etc.

These facts are drawn only from such passages as contain the term *waḥy* (in its various forms) in connection with the communication of the Qur'ân to the Prophet. These are, however, very strongly supplemented and corroborated by a far larger number of passages dealing with the same subject but not using the

term *waḥy* and showing clearly that the Qur'ân was delivered to the Prophet verbatim and in the form of specific texts. These passages will be considered a little later on in connection with the discussion on the views of Watt who, it will be seen, attempts in his own way merely to substantiate the views of Bell.[1] It should be clear from the above, however, that Bell's confusion and mistakes arise from: (a) his having concentrated his attention on the general use of the term *waḥy* in the Qur'ân; (b) his having failed to notice that the meanings he has suggested for the word do not properly convey its sense even in the cases he has cited (e.g., *wahy* to the earth); (c) his having made no distinction between the general sense and the technical sense of the term; (d) his not having recognized the distinction between the Qur'ânic *waḥy* on the one hand and the other types of *waḥy* to the Prophet, on the other; (e) his not having taken proper account of even those passages that use the term *waḥy* in speaking about the transmission of the Qur'ân to the Prophet, and, finally, (f) his not having at all taken into consideration the vast number of passages that deal with the same subject without using the term *waḥy* but employing a number of other expressions that very clearly and unequivocally elucidate the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy*. In fine, it may once again be pointed out that one is of course free to believe or not to believe that the Qur'ân is Allah's words; but if one attempts to pronounce a judgement on its nature on the basis of the Qur'ânic evidence, one must take into account the whole range of evidences and should not simply satisfy oneself with those that are not quite to the point and, further, should not twist or misinterpret, instead of admitting the "natural" sense of any expression or statement.

[1] *Infra*, chap. VI and VII.

CHAPTER VI
THE ORIENTALISTS ON THE QUR'ÂNIC *WAḤY*: III. WATT'S TREATMENT OF AL-ZUHRÎ'S REPORT ON THE COMING OF *WAḤY*

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Watt takes over from his predecessors, particularly from Margoliouth and Bell, and attempts to support mainly their assumptions. Thus he reiterates (a) that the Prophet had initially claimed to have seen Allah; (b) that Jibrîl was introduced at a later stage as the conveyer of *waḥy*; (c) that *waḥy* does not mean verbal communication of a text, but "suggestion" or "inspiration" to follow a practical line of conduct or to give out the Qur'ân and (d) that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* is in some form or other part of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) consciousness.

In reproducing his predecessors' views, however, Watt does not always recite their premises and grounds. Thus, while Bell would discount the traditions concerning the coming of *waḥy* as fabrications of a later age and would not take them into consideration in this connection, Watt would not do so. He would rather try to support the Margoliouth-Bell assumptions by having recourse to both the Qur'ân and the traditions. In doing so, however, he would select only such traditions as he thinks support his views. In such a case he would not go into the question of the authenticity of the particular tradition and would simply dispose of the matter by observing that much is not to be gained by discussing the *isnâd*. Even then he would not abide by the information supplied by his chosen piece of the report as a whole but would accept only those parts of it as suit his purpose and would reject the other parts as of doubtful validity. He also advances some further arguments, not quite his own, to support the Margoliouth-Bell theory. Thus he uses the expressions *al-rûḥ* and *al-ḥaqq,* as mentioned in the Qur'ân and the traditions in connection with the coming of *waḥy*, and interprets them as being coterminous with Allah. Again, while Margoliouth uses the writing of Podmore, Watt has recourse to that of A. Poulain to provide a psychological/mystical explanation of the phenomena of *waḥy.*

Another remarkable feature of Watt's approach is that unlike his predecessors he makes a specific claim to impartiality in theological matters and to academic objectivity. He even castigates the previous European writes in general for their lack of sympathetic understanding of Islam and its Prophet. Such declarations of impartiality and neutrality, besides being uncalled for, are sharply at odds with the

practical line of approach he adopts; for he in fact and essence reiterates mainly his predecessors' views and assumptions, and that too with no discernible degree of greater sympathy towards Islam and the Prophet.

II. WATT'S SEGMENTATION OF AL-ZUHRÎ'S REPORT

Watt starts his discussion on the coming of *wahy* by quoting what he calls Al-Zuhrî's report. This report, it may be pointed out, is in fact 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report coming through Al-Zuhrî and reproduced in various works including *Bukhârî* and the work of Al-Tabarî. It is to be noted at the outset that the version in *Bukhârî* is the most authentic and reliable. Watt, however, prefers Al-Ṭabarî's version saying that it "has not been rewritten, as has Ibn Hishâm's version."[1] He does not mention *Bukhârî* at all in this connection. In Al-Ṭabarî's work Al-Zuhrî's report consists of some three paragraphs, the first two being a continuous account and the third being in the nature of an independent report reproduced by Al-Ṭabarî a couple of pages subsequent to the first two paragraphs. Watt reproduces this text in his own translation. In doing so, however, he breaks the three paragraphs into as many as 12 "passages", which he numbers alphabetically from A to L, stating that he has done so "for convenience" and that the divisions "come at breaks in az-Zuhrî's material, as indicated by the change of narrator."[2] In order to enable the reader the better to understand Watt's treatment we reproduce in the footnote Al-Ṭabarî's text in Arabic, indicating in round brackets the portions that are broken into 12 passages by Watt and numbered respectively from A to L.[3]

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[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 40.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] The Arabic text runs as follows:

(فحدثني أحمد بن عثمان المعروف بابي الحوزاء قال حدثنا وهب بن جرير قال حدثنا أبي قال: سمعت النعمان بن راشد يحدث عن الزهري عن عروة عن عائشة أنها قالت:كان أول‌ما ابتدى به رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من الوحي الرؤيا الصادقة كانت تحي ءمسـ ثل فلق الصبح) (ثم حبب اليه الخلاء فكان‌بغار حراء يتحنث فيه الليالى ذوات العدد قبل‌أن يرجع الى أهله ثم يرجع الى أهله فيتزود لمثلها حتى فحأه الحق فأتاه فقال: يا محمد أنت رسول الله) (قال رسول‌الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فجثوت لركبتي و أنا قائم ثم زحفت ترجف بوادري ثم دخلت على خديجة فقلت: زملوني زملوني حتى ذهب عني الروع ثم أتاني فقال: يا محمد أنت‌رسول الله) (قال: فلقد هممت أن أطرح نفسي من حالق‌من حبل فتبدى لي حين هممت بذلك فقال: يا محمد أنا جبريل و أنت رسول الله) (ثم قال: اقرأ قلت: ما أقرأ؟ قال‌فأخذني فغتني ثلاث مرات حتى بلغ مني الجهد ثم قال:اقرأ باسم ربك الذى خلق فقرأت) (فأتيت خديجة فقلت: لقد أشفقت على نفسي فأخبرتها خبري فقالت: أبشر فوالله لا يخزيك الله أبدا والله انك لتصل الرحم و تصدق الحديث وتؤدي الأمانة و تحمل الكل وتقري الضيف و تعين على نوائب الحق) (ثم انطلقت بي الى ورقة بن نوفل بن أسدقالت اسمع من ابن أخيك فسألني فأخبرته خبري‌فقال : هذا الناموس الذي أنزل على موسى بن عمران ليتني فيها جذع ليتني أكون حيا حين يخرجك قومك قلت: أمخرجي هم؟قال نعم انه لم يجيء رجل قط بما جئت به الا عودي ولئن أدركني يومك أنصرك نصرا مؤزرا) (ثم كان أول ما نزل علي من القرآن بعد اقرأ ن والقلم و ما يسطرون ما أنت بنعمة ربك بمجنون و ان لك لأجرا غير ممنون وانك لعلى خلق عظيم فستبصر و يبصرون و يا أيها المدثر قم فأنذر و والضحى والليل اذا سجى)

(حدثنا محمد بن عبد الأعلى قال: حدثنا ابن ثور عن معمر عن الزهري قال: فتر الوحي عن رسول الله صلى الله عليهو سلم فترة فحزن حزنا شديدا جعل يغدو الى رءوس شواهق الجبال ليتردى منها فكلما أوفى بذروة جبل تبدى له جبريل فيقول : انك نبي الله فيسكن لذلك جأشه و ترجع اليه نفسه) (فكان‌النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم يحدث عن

The following is a summary of Watt's translation of the twelve passages into which he divides Al-Ṭabari's version of Al-Zuhrî's report:

A. In this passage Watt places the first part of 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report which says that the beginning of revelation was with *al-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah* which he translates as "true vision". "It used to come like the breaking of dawn."

B. In the second passage Watt places the portion of the report which immediately follows the above and which says that afterwards solitude became dear to the Prophet and he went to Ḥirâ' for *taḥannuth*, ending with the statement: "At length, unexpectedly, the Truth came to him and said, O Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God."

C. In the third passage Watt places the portion which comes immediately after the above and wherein the Messenger of Allah says he had been standing but fell on his knees, then he went to Khadîjah (r.a.) and asked her to cover him, which was done, until his panic was over, ending with the statement: "Then he came to me and said, O Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God.".

D. In the fourth passage are placed the succeeding few lines of the report wherein the Messenger of Allah is stated to have said that he had been meditating throwing himself from a mountain crag, but while he was so meditating, "he appeared to me and said, O Muhammad, I am Gabriel, and thou art the Messenger of God."

E. In the fifth passage are placed the few succeeding lines of the report that narrate the angel's saying to the Messenger of Allah: "Recite", and his replying: "I cannot recite (or "what shall I recite")"; then the angel's squeezing him thrice and then saying: "Recite in the name of thy Lord who created. And I recited."

F. In the sixth passage are placed a few more succeeding lines of the report that speak of the Messenger of Allah's returning to Khadîjah (.r.a.), expressing anxiety about himself and her words of consolation to him, ending with the statement: "You succour the agents of the truth(?)."

G. In the seventh passage are placed a few further lines of the report that speak of Khadîjah's (r.a.) taking her husband to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, his listening to the Messenger of Allah's experience and then remarking : "This is the *nâmûs* which was sent down (or revealed) to Mûsâ", adding that the Messenger of Allah would be expelled by his tribe together with the Messenger of Allah's surprise at

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ذلك قال: بينما أنا أمشي يوما اذ رأيت الملك الذي كان يأتيني بحراء على كرسي بين السماء والأرض فجثثت منه رعبا فرجعت الى خديجة فقلت: زملوني) (فزملناه – أى دثرناه – فأنزل الله عز و جل: يا أيها المدثر قم فأنذر و ربك فكبر و ثيابك فطهر) (قال الزهري: فكان أول شيءأنزل عليه: اقرأ باسم ربك الذى خلق حتى بلغ ما لم يعلم)

that, etc., ending with Waraqah's remark that if he lived long he would help him valiantly.

H. In the eighth passage are placed the next few lines of the report wherein the Messenger of Allah is stated to have said that the first part of the Qur'ân to be revealed was *sûrah* 96 (*al-'Alaq*), *sûrah* 68:1-5 (*al-Qalam)*, *sûrah* 74:1-2 (*al-Muddaththir*) and *sûrah* 93:1-2 (*al-Ḍuḥâ*).

I. In the ninth passage is reproduced part of Al-Zuhrî's report about the *fatrah* (pause) in the coming of *waḥy*, which is given by Al-Ṭabarî a couple of pages subsequently and which says that the Messenger of Allah became so sad at the cessation of *waḥy* that he used to go to the mountain tops to throw himself down from them and that each time he was about to do so the angel Jibrîl appeared before him and said: "Thou art the Prophet of Allah. At this his restlessness would cease..."

J. In the tenth passage a few more lines of the above mentioned report which says that speaking about the *fatrah* the Messenger of Allah said "While I was walking one day, I saw the angel who used to come to me at Ḥirâ' on a throne (*kursî*) between heaven and earth. I was stricken with fear of him, and returned to Khadîjah and said: cover me."

K. In the eleventh passage is placed the continuing lines of the report that say: "So we covered him, that is we put a *dathar* on.... and God the most high sent down, O thou clothed in *dathar*.... Thy garments purify."

L. In the twelfth passage are placed the remaining lines of the report in which Al-Zuhrî states that the first revelation to the Prophet was: Recite in the name of thy Lord who created.... up to what he did not know."

Watt also gives the summary of Al-Zuhrî's report from Jâbir ibn 'Abd Allah al-'Anṣârî about *fatrah* and the revelation of the first part of *sûrat al-Muddaththir.* Thus having reproduced Al-Zuhrî's report Watt proceeds to consider what he calls "the internal evidence of the passages" and the "various features of the stories". He does so under seven sub-headings and a final section. The sub-headings are as follows:

(a) Muhammad's visions"

(b) "The visit to Ḥirâ'; *taḥannuth*"

(c) "Thou art the Messenger of God"

(d) "Recite"

(e) "*Sûrat al-Muddaththir;* the *fatrah*"

(f) "Muhammad's fear and despair"

(g) Encouragement from Khadîjah and Waraqah"

The final section is entitled: "The form of Muhammad's Prophetic consciousness". These are discussed below.

A. " MUHAMMAD'S VISIONS"

Watt starts his discussion under this first sub-heading of his by referring to that part of Al-Zuhrî's report which he places in his passage A. He says that there are no good grounds for doubting that Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) prophetic experience began with "true vision" and observes that this "is quite distinct from dreams" and that "visions are mentioned also in B and J (apart from the appearances of Gabriel in D and I)."[1]

It may at once be pointed out that Watt adopts here simply Bell's translation of the expression *al-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah*. The faults in Bell's assumption have already been pointed out and it has been shown that the expression means "true dreams" and not "true vision".[2] It may also be recalled that Al-Zuhrî's, or rather 'Â'ishah's (r.a.) report in *Bukhârî* which Bell quotes contains the expression "in sleep" after "true dreams". Al-Ṭabarî's version of the report, which is not quite accurate and which Watt adopts, does not of course contain the expression "in sleep", but it is clear from the internal evidence of even this version that *al-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah* which is stated as the beginning of the Prophetic experience is a stage quite distinct from, and prior to, the one that followed, namely, *taḥannuth* at the cave of Ḥirâ' and the experience which came in its wake. The unequivocal statement of the report, which Watt places at the start of his passage B, is: "Afterwards solitude became dear to him, and he would go to a cave on Ḥirâ' to engage in *taḥannuth...*" Watt disregards this clear distinction between the two types of experiences described in the report, adopts the faulty or rather tendentious translation of Bell and thus equates the expression *al-ru'yâ al ṣâdiqah* with the other type of experience described in his passages B and J, thus doing violence to the tenor and purport of the text he himself adopts. The post-*taḥannuth* experience is nowhere described in the traditions, nor in the Qur'ân as *ai-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah*. A moment's reflection also makes it clear that the addition of the adjective *al-ṣâdiqah* to the act, *al-ru'yâ*, indicates that it is a description of that type of viewing which is usually

[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 42.

[2] *Supra*, pp. 117-120.

and normally not "true", that is dream. No one would bother to add the adjective "true" to the act of physical viewing with one's eyes.

Watt's purpose is, however, to bring the so-called "vision" in line with what is described in *sûrat al-Najm,* and thus support the Margoliouth-Bell theory discussed in the previous chapters. Hence, immediately after having made the above noted statements Watt cites that *sûrah* as supportive evidence of the "vision" and quotes its first 18 *'âyahs* (omitting *'âyahs* 11 and 12) in his own translation. He then observes that "there are good grounds for thinking that Muhammad originally interpreted these as visions of God Himself."[1] The grounds mentioned by Watt are:

(i) "There is no mention of Jibrîl in the Qur'ân until the Medinan period."

(ii) The subject of the verbs in verse 10 of the *sûrat al-Najm* should be God, or else the construction becomes "awkward".

(iii) "The phrase at the end of passage B, 'the Truth came to him and said...' is similar in import," for "the Truth is a way of referring to God."

(iv) Jâbir ibn 'Abd Allah's tradition, which is referred to by Bell, quotes the Prophet as saying, in Bell's translation: "...I heard a voice calling me, and I looked all around but could see no one; then I looked above my head and there he was sitting upon the throne..."[2]

In translating the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* Watt adopts Bell's rendering of the terms *waḥy* and *'awḥâ* as "suggestions" and "suggested". These meanings, as pointed out in the previous chapter, are not at all correct for Qur'ânic *waḥy.* Moreover, Watt's statement, "Muhammad originally interpreted" etc. suggests that the passage of *sûrat al-Najm*, on which Watt obviously bases his statement, is an "interpretation", that is, a composition by Muḥammad (p.b.h.), a view which is common to all the orientalists, though Watt appears not to avow it openly.

As regards the grounds mentioned by Watt all, except iii, are simply Bell's. These assertions of his and their premises have already been examined and it has been shown that each item of the assumptions is untenable. In iv Watt does not specifically reiterate Bell's mistaken claim that "the throne" is appropriate to Allah and leaves the reader to understand it. The mistake in this particular assumption has also been pointed out.[3] As regards Jâbir ibn 'Abd Allah al-'Anṣârî's report, which Watt himself cites,[4] it may be noted that it unequivocally points out that

[1] WATT, *M. at M.*, 42.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] See the previous chapter.
[4] WATT, *M. at M.*, 41.

the Messenger of Allah "saw the angel" who used to come to him at Ḥirâ', "on a chair between the sky and the earth."[1]

Regarding Watt's own addition to the stock of arguments, namely iii above, two things need to be noted. First, the version of Al-Zuhrî's report in *Bukhârî* and other works is slightly different at this point. In these works the text runs as: *hattâ jâ'ahu al-ḥaqq wa huwa fî ghâr Ḥirâ' fa jâ'ahu al-malak fa qâla...*, meaning "till the truth came to him while he was in the cave of Hira'. The angel came to him and said...." In Al-Ṭabari's version, which Watt quotes, the expression is : *fa ja'ahu al-ḥaqq fa 'atâhu fa qâla...*, meaning "Till the truth surprised him. He came to him and said..." Thus the expression *fa ja'ahu* is replaced by *fa jâ'ahu*, and there is no mention of the angel at this point. But it is to be noted that *fa ja'ahu al-ḥaqq* is one sentence, and *fa 'atâhu fa qâla* is another sentence. Watt, however, does not translate this part of the report quite faithfully. He combines the two sentences into one, translating it as: "At length unexpectedly the Truth came to him and said...." The Arabic equivalent of this translation would be: *fa jâ'ahu al-ḥaqq fa qâla.* Watt has thus omitted the expression *fa 'atâhu*, which is the beginning of an independent sentence. He has also capitalized the first letter of "truth" so that the meaning is more in line with his suggestion. If this was not done, and if due attention was paid to the specific mention of the angel at two places in the text which is continuous here in the original but which he has broken into as many as seven passages "for convenience", it would have been clear that the subject of the verb *fa 'atâhu* is the angel. Even after such division of a continuous text Watt recognizes that the angel Jibrîl is mentioned by name not very far away from this part, i.e., in what he chops into passage D.

Further, it is to be noticed that in the original Arabic text, which is continuous, the appearance of the entity is mentioned three times thus: *fa 'atâhu fa qala.... thumma 'atânî fa qâla.... fa tabaddâ lî... fa qâla yâ Muḥammad 'anâ Jibrîl,* meaning: "So he came to me and said.... Then he came to me and said.... Thereupon he appeared before me... and said: O Muhammad, I am Jibrîl." The prepositions *fa*, *thumma* and *fa* prefixed to the verbs show conclusively that the same entity is spoken of throughout. Up to this point in the report there is no break in the narrative nor any change of narrator. The sole narrator here is 'Â'ishah (r.a.) who is giving the account sometimes in her own words and sometimes in the words of the Prophet himself. Watt himself seems to recognize this fact when he says:

[1] See Al-Ṭabari, *Târîkh*, p. 1156.

"Passages A to H were presumably continuous in az-Zuhrî, but they need not all have come from 'Â'ishah."[1] The manoeuvre thus made here to create doubt about 'A'ishah (r.a.) being the narrator is obvious but not justifiable. Passage H of course comes in Al-Ṭabarî in a separate paragraph, and it need not have come from her; but there can be no doubt that the section previous to H is a continuous narrative and the sole narrator is 'Â'ishah (r.a.). Watt makes another attempt to confuse the issue here. He says that the fact "that Ibn Ishâq breaks off 'Â'ishah's narrative after the first sentence of B [i.e., "Afterwards solitude became dear to him"] is probably due to his having other versions of the remainder which he preferred, and does not necessarily indicate a break in the source at that point."[2] The remark is curious because if Ibn Ishâq's having preferred "other versions" does not "necessarily indicate a break in the source at that point", why then this emphasis on his breaking off of 'Â'ishah's narrative? The remark is also inappropriate, because we are concerned here with 'Â'ishah's (Al-Zuhrî's) account as given in Al-Ṭabari, and not with Ibn Ishâq's version which Watt himself does not adopt because, according to him, it has been rewritten. It appears that while dividing Al-Zuhrî's account into so many passages on the ground of what he calls breaks in the material indicated by change of narrator, Watt cannot at the same time conceal the fact that there really is no break in the narrative in its greater and most material part, nor any change of narrator there, and that the divisions made by him are arbitrary and not even in accordance with the grounds he has advanced for his doing so.

It seems that the real reason for his having sliced Al-Zuhrî's account into so many passages is to suggest, as he does shortly afterwards, that the speaker to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) in passage B is "the Truth", in C "merely he" and in D and I Jibrîl.[3] Watt also intends to maintain that Jibrîl, who is mentioned by name in two of the passages, need not be taken into account in connection with the coming of *waḥy* to Muḥammad (p.b.h.). It must not, however, be lost sight of that Al-Zuhrî's account is very much continuous and that even after the divisions introduced on purpose by Watt the existence of the prepositions *fa, thumma* and *fa* with the verbs that follow the sentence *fa ja'ahu al-ḥaqq* shows that it is the same entity, Jibrîl, who is spoken of throughout and who is mentioned by name at the end. The sequence of the description as well as grammatical rules require that Jibrîl should

[1] WATT, *M.at M,* 41..
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 45.

be the subject of the verb *fa 'atâhu* with which the narration starts here and which Watt omits from his translation .

The third thing to note in this connection is the relation of the sentence *fa ja'ahu al-ḥaqq* (Suddenly the truth came to him) with what follows in the text, as well as the meaning of the expression *al-ḥaqq*. It may be recalled that the expression in other versions of the report is *fa jâ'ahu al-ḥaqq* (Then the truth came to him". There is, however, little difference in the sense in either form. What follows in the text is of course a description of how "the truth" came to the Prophet; but neither does *al-ḥaqq* mean Allah, nor is it, as shown above, the subject of the verbs that occur in the description which follows. Watt puts the meaning of Allah upon the expression because, according to him, "this is a way of referring to God."[1] His reasoning itself betrays an admission that there are other senses in which the term *al-ḥaqq* is used. Indeed, it occurs more than 260 times in the Qur'ân in more than 20 different senses.[2] Nowhere in the Qur'ân, however, does *al-ḥaqq* appear independently to denote Allah. It is only at 9 places that it comes as an attribute of Him, but always along with the mention of Allah or *rabb,* such as at 10:30, 10:32, 20:114, 23:116, 24:25, etc.[3] On the other hand, it has been used in the sense of Qur'ânic *waḥy* more than fifty times., being the largest single majority of instances in which it has been used in a particular sense, and that also almost always with the verb *jâ'a.* Some of the instances are as follows:

(1) فلما جاءهم الحق من عندنا قالوا ان هذا لسحر مبين

"When *al-ḥaqq* came to them from Us they said: This is indeed evident sorcery" (10:76)

(2) لقد جاءك الحق من ربك فلا تكونن من الممترين

"*Al-ḥaqq* has indeed come to you from your Lord. So be in no wise of those in doubt." (10:94)

(3) فلما جاءهم الحق من عندنا قالوا لو لا أوتي مثل ما أوتي موسى

"But when *al-ḥaqq* has come to them from Ourselves, they say: Why is he not given the like of what Mûsâ was given?" (28:48)

(4) بل متعت هؤلاء و ءاباءهم حتى جاءهم الحق و رسول مبين

"Rather I have given good things to these people and their ancestors, till *al-ḥaqq* has come to them, and a Messenger making things clear." (43:29)

(5) ولما جاءهم الحق قالوا هذا سحر و انا به كافرون

"And when *al-ḥaqq* came to them they said: This is sorcery and we reject it." (43:30)

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[1] *Ibid.*, 42.

[2] See for instance 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Râwî, *Kalimat al-Ḥaqq Fî al-Qur'ân,* 2 Vols, Imam Muḥammad University, Riyadh, 1409 H.

[3] The expressions respectively at these places are: *mawlâhum al-Ḥaqq, rabbukum al-Ḥaqq, Allahu al-Malik al-Ḥaqq* (at 20:114 and 20:116) and *Allahu Huwa al-Ḥaqq.* The other places are 18:44, 22:6, 22:62 and 31:30.

الذى أنزل اليك من ربك هو الحق (6)

And that which has been sent down to you from your Lord is *al-ḥaqq*." (34:6)

والذى أوحينا اليك من الكتاب هو الاحق (7)

"And that which We have communicated to you of the Book is *al-ḥaqq."* (35:31)

Thus, a reference to the Qur'ân (as well as to the traditions) makes it clear that the most frequent use of *al-ḥaqq* is in the sense of Qur'ânic *waḥy* and that the term, though undoubtedly an attribute of Allah, has never been used independently to denote Allah. The expression *fa ja'ahu al-haqq* or *fa jâ'ahu al-haqq* in the account under discussion therefore means the coming of *wahy* and not, as Watt would have us believe, the appearance of Allah before the Prophet.

Having attempted to show from Al-Zuhrî's account and *sûrat al-Najm* that the Prophet claimed to have a "vision" of Allah, Watt proceeds to state that if this was "Muhammad's original interpretation of the vision, it could hardly have been his final one, for it contradicts 6:103 which says 'sight reacheth not Him'."[1] In this connection Watt also refers to *'âyah* 11 of the *sûrah* (*al-Najm*) which he quotes in Bell's translation as "the heart did not falsify what it saw" and states that this *'ayah* was "perhaps added later."[2] One may easily detect that here Watt merely reproduces Bell's views that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) first claimed to have seen Allah and then, as he realized his mistake, modified his position and introduced the *'âyah* in question in the *sûrah* to give an impression of a spiritual or mental vision. The premises on which these assumptions are based have already been examined and shown to be untenable. It may once again be emphasized that neither Al-Zuhrî's account nor *sûârat al-Najm* speaks of a "vision of Allah", so that there is no question of contradiction with another Qur'ânic passage such as 6:103, nor of subsequent modification in the *'âyahs* of *sûrat al-Najm*. The "vision" of Allah is a groundless surmise, on which is based a further incorrect assumption of contradiction and a still further conjecture of modification, all of which are wrong and untenable.

It may be recalled that *'âyah* 18 of *sûrat al-Najm*, which speaks of the Prophet's having seen with his own eyes (*baṣar*) "one of the greatest signs of his Lord", runs counter to the theory of mental or spiritual vision as also of a vision of Allah. Bell silently passes over this *'âyah* when he presents his theory. Watt, however, undertakes to fill this lacuna in Bell's presentation and attempts to bring the *'ayah* in line with the theory of spiritual vision. Hence, referring to this *'âyah* he

[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 43.
[2] *Ibid.*

observes that this "might be taken to mean that what Muhammad had seen was a sign or symbol of the glory and majesty of God". Watt then relates it to *'âyah* 11, which he translates as "the heart did not falsify what it saw" and says that this suggests "that while the eyes perceived the sign or symbol, the heart perceived the thing symbolized." Thus, continues Watt, though Muhammad's (p.b.h.) original interpretation of the "vision as a direct vision of God" was "not quite accurate, in essentials he was not mistaken. Perhaps the verse ought to be translated: 'the heart was not mistaken in respect of what he, the man saw."[1]

The above remarks are clearly based on the faulty assumption that the Prophet had "originally interpreted the vision as a direct vision of God". He did *not* do so; nor does the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* bear that meaning. Hence there is no conflict between the *'âyahs* of the *surah* and therefore no need to advance such an interpretation as would bring them into agreement. The interpretation is in fact an unwarranted twist in the meaning of the *'ayah* 11, for Watt says: "while the eyes perceived the sign or symbol, the heart perceived the thing symbolized", that is, Allah. This *'âyah* in no way suggests that the eyes perceived one thing, that is a *sign of Allah*, and the heart saw or perceived another thing, that is Allah. The plain meaning of the *'âyah* is that the heart and the eyes were in unison — it was no mistake of the heart, that is, no mistaken impression of the Prophet's about what he saw with his eyes. "The heart was not mistaken", as Watt translates it alternatively, "in respect of what he, the man saw." The whole emphasis is on the very antithesis of a mental or spiritual vision.

Watt's aim in giving this twist in the sense is, as he plainly states, "to avoid making it a vision of Gabriel, which would be unhistorical, and also to avoid contradicting the view of Islamic orthodoxy that Muhammad had not seen God."[2] The question arises: why this eagerness to prove that it was not Jibrîl who appeared before the Prophet, if the clear meaning of the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* is, as Watt and Bell would have us believe, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) originally mistook it to be a direct vision of God and subsequently rectified the mistake by giving the impression of a mental vision? Watt's avowed object rather betrays an awareness on his part of the fact that the interpretation he puts on the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* is not quite its plain meaning. Also the reason given, namely, that a vision of Jibrîl "would be unhistorical", is clearly based on the old plea that Jibrîl is not mentioned by name in the Makkan passages of the Qur'ân. That plea has

[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 43.
[2] *Ibid.*

already been shown to be untenable and incorrect.[1] The plea is also inconsistent on Watt's part; for, unlike Bell, he does not seem to hold the view that the traditions should not be taken into consideration in this connection. Watt recognizes that there is clear mention of Jibrîl in Al-Zuhrî's report, particularly in what he puts in his passages D and I. Watt attempts to get rid of these passages by observing that the mention of Jibrîl therein is suspicious, thus implying that those parts of the report have been tampered with by subsequent narrators. The implication is also inconsistent with the very ground on which he prefers this version of Al-Zuhrî's report, namely, that it has not been rewritten as, according to him, has Ibn Isḥâq's been. If subsequent reporters had modified those portions of the report, they would have modified also its initial part where the coming of the truth is mentioned; for, according to Watt, that term means the appearance of God before the Prophet and that is contrary to what he calls the Islamic orthodoxy. The fact is that neither those parts of the report that mention Jibrîl are later interpolations, nor does the coming of the truth mean the appearance of Allah. It may also be recalled that the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* is not the only Qur'ânic information regarding the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet and that the passage should be understood in combination with similar passages in the Qur'an, particularly 81:19-23, as explained earlier.[2]

Watt is of course aware of the existence of other Qur'ânic passages in this respect. Before noticing how he deals with them it is necessary to refer to the second motive in his above mentioned interpretation of the passage of *sûrat al-Najm*, namely, as he says, "to avoid contradicting the view of Islamic orthodoxy that Muhammad had not seen God." A glance at the previous chapter of the present work would make it clear that this statement of Watt's is based on the totally groundless assumption of Bell that the so-called orthodox Islamic belief in this respect was a development subsequent to the time of the Prophet's and that it is at variance with what Bell thinks the Qur'ânic testimony to the effect that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had originally claimed to have seen Allah. The question thus once again turns upon the interpretation of the *sûrat al-Najm*, and once again it should be pointed out that the interpretation given by Bell and Watt is wrong.

As regards the other Qur'ânic passages bearing on the question Watt disposes of them by invoking the opinion of Karl Ahrens who says that there is no mention of Jibrîl in the Makkan passages of the Qur'ân, that the *rasûl karîm* of

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[1] *Supra*, pp. 124-125.

[2] *Supra*, pp. 118-120.

81:19 was originally identified with *al-rûḥ,* and that angels are mentioned in the Makkan passages in the plural only. Watt also calls attention in this connection to 26:193 — "with which hath come down the Faithful Spirit" – and says that this would "fit in with the view here developed",[1] that is, the view that the Prophet had a spiritual vision of God.

Karl Ahrens is right in saying that the *rasûl karîm* of 81:19 is identifiable with *al-rûḥ* (as in 97:4); but it is not correct that *al-rûḥ* or *al-rûḥ al-'amîn* (the faithful spirit) is other than Jibrîl or that it fits in with the view of a spiritual vision of God. Nor is it correct that angels are mentioned only in the plural in the Makkan passages of the Qur'ân.[2]

Let us now consider the three Qur'ânic passages cited here, namely, 81:19, 97:4 and 26:193. As regards the first passage,[3] four points need to be noted carefully. (a) The *rasûl karîm* (noble messenger) here is mentioned specifically as a conveyer of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*. (b) The very fact that he is described as a *noble messenger* militates against his being identical with God; he is simply His messenger. (c) The same nature of his is emphasized in the immediately following *'âyah* , 81:20, wherein it is said that he has his position "near the Lord of the Throne". That means he is not in any way to be confused with the "Lord of the Throne" (i.e. God). It is further stated in this *'âyah* that he is a possessor of strength (*dhî quwwah*). The similarity of this phrase with the description "strong in power" (*shadîd al-quwa*) in *sûrat al-Najm* is striking. (d) He is described in the next *'âyah,* 81:21, as "one obeyed" (*muṭâ'*) and "faithful" (*'amîn*). As he is not the Lord of the Throne, the expression "one obeyed" must have reference to the others like him who obeyed him, i.e., he has only a position of primacy among his compeers. In other words, he is some one "special" among a group of similar beings. It is also noteworthy that the adjective *'amîn* is strikingly the same as given to *al-rûḥ* in 26:193 – "the faithful spirit". Karl Ahrens, and with him Watt, agree in saying that the *rasûl karîm* of 81:19 is identifiable with *al-rûḥ*. Thus, by the internal evidence of the passage 81:19-21 and by their admission the *rasûl karîm* is the same as *al-rûḥ al-'amîn* and he is different from God and, moreover, is a conveyer of *waḥy*.

As regards the second passage, 97:4, the expression here is of course simply *al-rûḥ* along with *al-malâ'ikah* (the angels). Karl Ahrens and Watt seem to imply

[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 43.
[2] See for instance Q. 6:8, 9:50, 11:12, 11:31, 12:31, 17:95,32:11, 53:26 and 69:178.
[3] See also *supra*, pp. 118-120.

that *al-rûḥ* is different in nature from *al-malâ'ikah*; but that is not correct. It is a recognized style in Arabic language to mention the special one (*khâṣ*) separately from a general body of a particular group when they are to be mentioned together. Instances of such mention of the *khâṣ* separately along with the general body (*'âm*) are numerous in Arabic literature. But apart from this rule of the Arabic language, the internal evidence of the passage clearly marks out *al-rûḥ* to be different from God; for the sentence says that the angels (*al-malâ'ikah*) and *al-rûḥ* come down "by permission of their Lord" (*bi-'idhn rabbihim*). Therefore, the Lord of both the angels and *al-rûḥ* is different from them. Clearly *al-rûḥ* here is not identical with the Lord. And as he is mentioned specially along with the angels, he and they all coming down by permission of their Lord, the unavoidable meaning is that he, *al-rûḥ*, is a special one of them. And since the *rasûl karîm* in 81:19 is marked out as a special one and as the conveyer of *waḥy,* and since both Karl Ahrens and Watt agree in saying that the *rasûl karîm* is identical with *al-rûḥ,* he is the same being who brings *waḥy* and who is an angel. The identification of the *rasûl karîm* as an angel is supported by 31:1 which speaks of Allah's employing messengers (*rusul*) from among the angels. It is also to be noted that while the reference here is to the taking of angels as messengers in general, it is only a particular messenger in the singular who is always spoken of as the conveyer of *waḥy*.

Similarly the third passage, 26:193, clearly mentions "the faithful spirit" as the one who brings down *waḥy* (*nazala bihi al-rûḥ al-'amîn*). For the same reasons as stated above this *al-rûḥ al-'amîn* is the same as the *rasûl karîm*, who is described as *'amîn* (faithful) and as the conveyer of *waḥy*. The internal evidence here also distinguishes *al-rûḥ al-'amîn* from God; for, in the previous *'âyah*, 26:192, the Qur'ân (or Qur'ânic *waḥy*) is spoken of as "*tanzîl*, i.e., something sent down, by the Lord of all the worlds" (*wa innahu la-tanzîl rabb al-'âlamîn*). The causative nature of the expression *tanzîl* shows clearly that the "Lord of all the worlds" sent it down, not that He came down with it. The succeeding *'âyah*, 26:193, clarifies the position further and says that it is *al-rûḥ al-'amîn* who came down with it.

Thus the *rasûl karîm* and *al-rûḥ al-'amîn*, both of whom are mentioned as the conveyer of *waḥy*, are one and the same individual. That he is an angel is shown by (a) the mention of *al-rûḥ* along with angels as a special one among them (i.e. in 70:4, 78:38 and 97:4); (b) the mention of angels as having been employed as messengers by Allah (as in 35:1); (c) the mention of the conveyer of *waḥy* as a *noble*

messenger, i.e., a special one from among the angels who are taken as messenger; (d) the specific mention of him by name, Jibrîl, as the conveyer of *wahy* in 2:97 and (e) the mention of him by name in the traditions also as the conveyer of *waḥy*.

The name Jibrîl of course occurs only three times in the Madinan passages of the Qur'ân; but that does not mean that there is no reference to him in the Makkan passages. Nor that someone else is spoken of as the conveyer of *waḥy* in the Makkan passages. For one thing, the expressions *al-rûh* or *al-rûḥ al'amîn*, not to speak of the *rasûl karîm*, can by no stretch of the imagination be taken in the Christian sense of the Spirit or Holy Spirit, which is what Watt seems to suggest. The expressions *al-rûh, al-rûḥ al-'amîn* and *rûḥ al-qudus* occur some 21 times in the Qur'ân.[1] In none of the places it is used in the sense of Allah or His attribute. In six out of the twenty-one places it is used in connection with 'Îsâ (Jesus) and his mother Maryam;[2] but at each of these places it has the meaning of either the spirit of life or the angel (Jibrîl). In any case, at none of these places is the word coterminous with the Divine Being; for the unmistakable tenor and purport of each of the passages is to contradict the concept of the Trinity or to deny the supposed divinity of 'Îsâ. [3]

B. "THE VISIT TO HIRÂ'; *TAḤANNUTH*"

After presenting his views about what he calls "Muhammad's visions" Watt passes on to the second of his sub-titles: "The visit to Ḥirâ'; *taḥannuth*". It must not be supposed that the subject of the "visions" is left behind. It indeed forms a constant theme in all the sections of his treatment of the subject; and Watt's aim is all along to suggest that the "vision", indeed *waḥy*, is something mental, psychological or psycho-intellectual to the Prophet.

As regards the visit to Ḥirâ' and *taḥannuth*, Watt differs from his preceptor Bell who denies the authenticity of the reports about them. Watt says that there "is no improbability in Muhammad's going to Ḥira."[4] He then presents what one scholar very aptly calls "a compound version of the views " of others.[5] Watt states that Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) going to Ḥirâ' "might be a method of escaping from the

[1] Q. 2:87; 2:253; 4:171; 5:110; 16:2; 15:29 16:102; 17:85 (two times); 19:17; 21:91; 26:193; 32:9; 38:72; 40:15; 42:51; 58:22;66:12; 70:4; 78:38 and 97:4.

[2] Q. 2:87; 2:253; 4:171; 5:110; 21:91; 66:12.

[3] See for a detailed discussion on *rûh* IBN AL-QAYYIM, *Kitâb al-Rûh*, Hyderabad, 1324 H. See for its summary in *M.W.*, 1935, pp. 129-144. Cf. D. B. MACDONALD, "The development of the idea of spirit in Islam", *M.W.*, 1932, pp. 25-42 and 153-168.

[4] WATT, *M. at M.*, 44.

[5] See M.J. KISTER, "*Al-Taḥannuth*: An Enquiry into the meaning of a term", *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXXI, 1968, p.229.

heat of Mecca in an unpleasant season for those who could not afford to go to at-Ṭâ'if." Having said that Watt adds immediately: "Judaeo-Christian influence, such as the example of monks, or a little personal experience" would have shown Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "the need and desirability of solitude."[1]

Watt's two consecutive sentences quoted above in fact represent two different views. The first view, that the resort to Ḥirâ' was something of a poor man's summer holiday was first suggested by Aloy Sprenger in the mid-nineteenth century.[2] Ever since he had made that suggestion, however, no European writer of note adopted that view or treated it as a reasonable explanation of the affair. Watt, however, adopts and reproduces it, without referring to Sprenger in any way. Neither Sprenger nor Watt asks himself the very pertinent questions whether the climate of Ḥirâ' differs in any way from that of the town of Makka in any season and why, of all the neighbouring hills, Hirâ' in particular should have been chosen as the supposed summer resort? If they had asked themselves these preliminary questions about the geography of Makka they would surely have given a second thought to this novel suggestion of theirs.

The second view, that of Judaeo-Christian influence, specially the instance of Christian monks, suggesting "the need and desirability of solitude", is indeed the suggestion of a number of Watt's predecessors, notably J. Herschfield [3]and Tor Andrae.[4] The unsoundness of the general assumption of Judaeo-Christian influence upon the evolution of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) thought has been noted earlier.[5] It may be observed here, however, that the two views thus put forth in two consecutive sentences are incompatible. If the retirement at Ḥirâ' was a sort of a summer holiday, there is no need to invoke Judaeo-Christian influence in the matter. If, on the other hand, it was done in imitation of the practice of the Christian monks, the summer holiday theory is both unnecessary and irrelevant.

After having made the above noted remarks about the retirement at Ḥirâ' Watt refers to the origin and meaning of the term *taḥannuth*. In doing so he generally follows what Bell and Herschfield suggest, namely, that the term means either prayer for God's favour or "doing some work to escape from sin or crime". Watt then proceeds to "fill out hypothetically", as he says, the account of what actually transpired. He says that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had, from an early age, been

[1] WATT, *M. at M.*, 44.
[2] A. SPRENGER, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed*, I, Berlin, 1860, pp. 295-296.
[3] H. HERSCHFILED, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, London, 1902, p. 10.
[4] TOR ANDRAE, *Mohammed, Sein Leben und Glaube*, Gottingen, 1932, pp. 34-35.
[5] *Supra*, Chapter II.

aware of the social and religious problems of Makka. His being an orphan made him all the more alive to those problems. He also imbibed the "vague monotheism found among the most enlightened Makkans." He also looked for some reform "and all the circumstances suggested that this reform must be primarily religious." In this state of mind he "deliberately sought solitude to reflect on Divine things and to perform some acts of worship, perhaps an expiation for sins."[1]

Watt thus in effect himself nullifies what he says previously about summer holidaying by Muḥammad (p.b.h.) and his probable imitation of the practice of the Christian monks. For, if he looked for some kind of reform in Makka and if "all the circumstances suggested that this reform must be primarily religious" and therefore he "deliberately sought solitude to reflect on Divine things" etc., both the surmises are unnecessary to explain Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) solitary retirement to Ḥirâ'. Watt's remarks are, however, based on two distinct suggestions made by his predecessors, notably by Muir and Margoliouth. The one is the suggestion of ambition and preparation on Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) part to play the role of a prophet-reformer.[2] The other is the theory that the political, religious and cultural situation in Arabia and the neighbouring Christian Byzantine state suggested that the contemplated reform should take on a religious character and that therefore Muḥammad (p.b.h.) decided to assume the role of a prophet. Also the remark that in his retirement he probably performed some act in "expiation of sins" is reminiscent of the Muir-Margoliouth views about his previous beliefs and practices.

All these views are faulty and debatable. The Prophet did of course retire into the cave of Ḥirâ' to reflect on Divine things; but there is no indication in the sources that he did so for discovering a framework for his contemplated socio-religious reform. Watt's story, as he himself points out, is hypothetical and, as we have pointed out, based in essence on the views of his predecessors. Whatever the Prophet's motive in seeking solitude at Ḥirâ', the coming of the revelation to him was by all accounts something sudden and unexpected. His bewilderment at what happened at Ḥirâ' and the subsequent consultation with Waraqah ibn Nawfal only emphasize this unexpectedness and unpreparedness on the Prophet's part. These facts thus run directly counter to the assumption of contemplated reform, indeed of ambition and preparation. In order to sustain the

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[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 44.
[2] *Supra*, Chapter I.

theory of contemplated reform it is necessary therefore to dismantle the fact of the suddenness of the affair, or at least to create doubt about it. This is exactly what Watt seems to aim at. Thus, immediately after having hypothetically filled out the account, he observes that though the traditional accounts "suggest that the vision came during the retreat", the "comparative dates of the different features of Muhammad's call are uncertain. Sometimes the appearance is said to be unexpected, and sometimes Khadîjah seems to have been not far away."[1]

It should at once be pointed out that whatever may be the uncertainty about what is called "the comparative dates of the different features" of the call, there is no uncertainty whatsoever about the order of its main features, nor about its suddenness and unexpectedness. By all the accounts the "call" took place in the wake of the retirement at Hirâ' and the "appearance" or "vision" was a simultaneous, indeed an inseparable feature of the call. Whether Khadîjah (r.a.) was near the Prophet at Ḥirâ', as stated in one of the reports reproduced by Ibn Ishâq, or the Prophet was at home near her, as said in the version of Al-Zuhrî's report quoted by Watt, the "appearance [of Jibrîl] was in every case sudden and unexpected. It is *not* "sometimes" that "the appearance is said to be unexpected"; it is always so in the reports. The emphasis on the suddenness and unexpectedness of the "call" and the "vision" is constant throughout all the reports in all their versions, despite their differences in matters of detail. Watt himself uses this sudden appearance of "the truth", as we have seen just a little while ago, to support his assumption of the "vision of God". But now he realizes that the facts of the suddenness of the "call" and the "vision", and the consequent bewilderment and uncertainty on the Prophet's part are strongly against the theory of his having planned and contemplated socio-religious reforms. Hence Watt attempts to create doubt about the suddenness of the "call" and to show that it was something independent of the "vision". In fact, in the remaining sections of his discussion on the subject Watt isolates the "vision" from the "call" and suggests that the Prophet, though he was uncertain about his position, nonetheless continued to receive revelations and to give them out to the public for about three years when, after the period of *fatrah* and of "secret" preaching he saw the "visions" or the first "vision".[2]

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[1] WATT, *M. at M.*, 44.

[2] See below, text.

C. "THOU ART THE MESSENGER OF GOD"

Watt thus takes up the subjects of "the call" and the "visions" under his above mentioned third sub-title. He starts by saying that in B, C, D and I of "the passages from az-Zuhrî" the words "Thou art the Messenger of God" occur four times – in the first passage the speaker is "the truth", in the second "merely 'he'" and in the last Jibrîl. He then says that the circumstances are different in the four passages and raises the question whether these are "four versions of one event, that somehow or other have developed different features?" Watt observes that the mention of Jibrîl "at this early stage" is "suspicious" since he "is not mentioned in the Qur'ân until much later" and adds that the "experiences" described in the passages belong to two types – those in the first two (B & C) describe Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) "original call to be a Messenger", and those in the other two (D & I) "appear to be reaffirmation of this to assure him in a time of anxiety."[1]

It is to be noted once again that what Watt calls "the passages from az-Zuhrî" are in fact passages made by Watt out of Al-Zuhrî's rather continuous account. By making such divisions in the text Watt has thought, or attempted to show, that the "speakers" in the passages B through D and further on are different. As noted above, neither the context, nor the grammatical rules of the language support this assumption. The speaker is throughout Jibrîl. Similarly the plea that the mention of Jibrîl at this stage is suspicious because he is not mentioned in the Qur'ân until much later is also untenable. It is also inconsistent with Watt's own approach; for he reproduces only Al-Ṭabarî's version of Al-Zuhrî's report to the exclusion of all the other versions on the ground that it has not been "rewritten", i.e., modified by others. His now casting doubt on part of this version and, indeed, his reliance on the Qur'ânic evidence only regarding Jibrîl, which he also misconceives, is glaringly inconsistent.

Watt's purpose is, however, to isolate "the call" from the "vision". Hence, immediately after having made the above mentioned statements he begins another paragraph by asking: "If B refers to the original call, what is its relation to the visions?" The question is clearly confusing. The passage B, as Watt has hitherto said, describes the "appearance" or the "vision" and he has attempted to suggest a little while ago that "the truth" mentioned in it should be understood in the sense of God. But now he slips away from that position and attempts to

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[1] Watt, *M. at M.*, 45.

suggest that the passage only describes the original call to be a Messenger, implying that this is different from the "vision" so that the relationship between the two should be determined. It should at once be pointed out that what he calls a description of the "original call" is nothing but what happened in the "vision" described in the passage B. His question thus really amounts to a queer one, namely, "What is the relation of the vision to the vision?"

After putting the above mentioned question Watt refers to the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* (53:1-18) and reiterates in effect what Bell says in this connection, namely, that the description of "the first vision" in that *sûrah* was given out in response to the Makkan unbelievers' objections to the genuineness of the revelations and that therefore at least one or several revelations had been proclaimed before the narration of the vision in that *sûrah*. Watt says further that the vision which was narrated "must have something to do" with the receipt of revelations; yet, "there is nothing to show that the receiving of specific passages accompanied the vision..." [1]

In making this last statement Watt obviously changes his ground again, and that in two ways. He slips away from the Qur'ânic evidence and seems to concentrate only on the evidence of the report he cites. Secondly, he now also implies that the passage B of that report describes a "vision" but does not mention the delivery of any specific passage; for, otherwise, there is no ground for his making the statement that "there is nothing to show that the receiving of specific passages accompanied the vision."

Now, the text which Watt assigns to the passage B and which he seems to have in view does of course only speak about the entity's addressing Muḥammad (p.b.h.) as "thou art the Messenger of God" and does not mention the delivery of any specific Qur'ânic passage. But, as already pointed out, Watt's passages A to G are all continuous in Al-Zuhrî's account as given in Al-Ṭabarî, and the narration up to the end of passage E speaks of the different circumstances attending the "call" and the delivery of the *iqra'* passage. In Watt's own translation the passage starts thus: "Then he said, Recite. I said, I cannot recite..." The expression "Then he" unmistakably relates to Jibrîl who is mentioned in the previous passage D. Watt of course doubts the mention of Jibrîl at this stage; but he (Watt) does not, and cannot, deny that the passage D speaks of an "appearance" or "vision" and that both the passages D and E together speak of a "vision" and the delivery of

[1] *Ibid.*

the *iqra'* passage which, elsewhere, Watt recognizes to be the first Qur'ânic passage to be delivered.[1] Thus, his statement that "there is nothing to show that the receiving of specific passages accompanied the vision" is untenable and contrary to the very evidence he relies on.

The statement is contrary also to the Qur'ânic evidence; for whatever may be the view of Bell and Watt about the entity appearing in the "vision" described in *sûrat al-Najm*, it categorically says that it was that entity, the *shadîd al-quwa* and *dhû mirrah*, who drew nearer than "two bow-lengths" and delivered to the Prophet what he was giving out as *waḥy* (*'âyahs* 4-10). The same fact is emphasized in 81:19-23 which says that it was a "saying" (*qawl*), i. e., a text, which was delivered by the "noble messenger" whom the Prophet had seen in "the clear horizon". Both the passages speak of a past event, and their reference is clearly to the initial *waḥy* which the Prophet had given out to the Makkans and which both the passages emphasize was delivered by the entity he saw.

Also, the other versions of Al-Zuhrî's report, particularly that in *Bukhârî*, clearly speak of the delivery of the *iqra'* passage by Jibrîl who appeared before the Prophet for the purpose. Watt withholds from his readers this and other versions of the report. In fact by doing so, and by all the other devices, namely, by arbitrarily dividing the version which he cites into so many artificial passages, by isolating the "call" from the "vision", by raising the queer question of their relationship and by making the untenable statement that no specific text was delivered during the "vision" Watt drives at his predecessors' main theory that the Qur'ânic revelation was not verbal but only in the nature of suggestions or ideas that came to the Prophet. Hence he further states that the "practical outcome of the vision" would be something like a "conviction that the passages were messages from God" and that the Prophet "was called upon to proclaim them publicly."[2]

Note the expression: "the passages were messages from God"; that is, the passages themselves were not from God, but only their messages were so. It is not explained by Watt how the "messages" could have been received prior to the "vision", nor why Muḥammad (p.b.h.), before he was even sure that they were from God, should have formulated them into "passages". Nor does Watt mention any such pre-vision passage. He simply argues backward from his assumption, namely, that since the "vision" imparted a "conviction that the passages were

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, 45.

messages from God", this "would presuppose that Muhammad had already received some revelations" but had not been sure about their nature; "now he is informed or given an assurance about that."[1] One may easily detect that this is merely a repetition, in another form, of the Muir-Margoliouth theory of the Prophet's having received other pre-Qur'ânic revelations prior to the *iqra'* passage.[2]

"Alternatively", continues Watt, "the vision might be taken as a call to seek revelations, and Muhammad might have known something about methods of inducing them." The theory of "inducing" of revelations, it may be recalled, is Margoliouth's.[3] He of course relates it to the physical hardships and other symptoms that at times attended the coming of revelations to the Prophet. Watt does not refer to Margoliouth and introduces the allegation at the first opportunity, that of the beginning of the "call" and the "vision", with the absurd implication that Muḥammad (p.b.h.), before he hardly began his mission, had already "known something of methods of inducing" revelations!

Watt does not, however, press this suggestion here; for, as we shall see presently, he reverts to it subsequently.[4] After having simply introduced the allegation he observes that "the former of the alternatives", that is, the outcome of the vision being only a conviction that the "passages" were "messages" from God, "is more probable"; for it is in line with the view, and here Watt specifically cites Bell, "that what was inspired or suggested to him was a 'practical line of conduct' which he in fact followed."[5] It may at once be pointed out that it is not only this particular expression, but the whole theory that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* does not mean verbal communication of a text, but "suggestion", or "inspiration", etc., which is Bell's and others' and which Watt simply undertakes to substantiate by some means or other. So far as this particular view is concerned, however, its untenability has been demonstrated earlier.[6]

Watt finally says that if "the purport of the vision was something general", that would agree with passage B. He then says that the words "Thou art the Messenger of God" were probably "not an exterior locution", nor even "an imaginative locution, but an intellectual locution", meaning that it was a

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Supra*, pp. 93-96, 114-117.
[3] *Supra*, p.100.
[4] *Infra*, ch. VII.
[5] WATT, *M. at M.*, 45.
[6] *Supra*, pp. 122-133.

"communication" which was made "without words". The form of the words may even be much later than the actual vision."[1]

These statements in fact constitute an admission on Watt's part that the "original call" and the "vision" are not really two distinct events, as he has hitherto implied, but are aspects of the same incident described in passage B. And as he recognizes this, he realizes that the "expression "Thou art the Messenger of God", though not a passage of the Qur'ân, nonetheless consists of "words" constituting a statement which was communicated to the Prophet during the "vision" described in the passage B. Hence he hastens to say that these words were probably "an intellectual locution". Now, observe his peculiar logic. He asserts that there is nothing to show that the communication of any specific text accompanied the "vision"; but now that he cannot deny that the passage B, which he has isolated from the rest of the account, also speaks of the communication of some "words", he tells his readers that these "words" were communicated "without words" – an intellectual locution! The fact is that his statement that the communication of no specific text accompanied the "vision" is belied and contradicted even by his passage B. Moreover, by saying that the "form of the words may even be much later than the actual vision" he makes an arbitrary assumption which is nowhere warranted by the sources, neither directly nor indirectly. In doing so he also casts doubt on the authenticity of his passage B. As we have seen, he casts doubt on passages D and I because they mention Jibrîl which fact does not fit in with his assumption. Now he implies incorrectness even on his passage B because there is the mention of the communication of "Thou art the Messenger of God", which fact contradicts his other assumption. Yet he would have us believe that his assumptions are supported by these very passages!

Even after such manoeuvres Watt cannot escape the fact that the *iqra'* passage, including his passages D and E, was by all accounts communicated during the "vision". Hence he proceeds to deal with it under his fourth sub-heading which is as follows.

D. "RECITE"

Under this sub-heading Watt attempts to make three points in three successive paragraphs. In the first he refers to what he calls the "numerous versions of the tradition" regarding the revelation of *sûrat al-'alaq* and then, with reference to

[1] WATT, *op.cit.*, 45-46. He refers here to the work of A Poulain and to section 5 of his chapter where the expression "intellectual locution" is explained.

Al-Zuhrî's account, says that the words *ma aqra'u* occurring therein "must be translated 'I cannot read (or recite)'"; for there is the variant, *mâ 'anâ bi-qâri'in* in other versions and because, also, Ibn Hishâm makes a distinction between *mâ 'aqra'u* and *mâ dhâ 'aqra'u*, the latter expression meaning "What shall I recite?" Having said this Watt asserts: "This latter is also the more natural meaning for *mâ aqra'u.*" In support of this statement he levels an allegation against the traditionists in general saying: "It is almost certain that the later traditionists avoided the natural meaning of the words" in order to sustain the "dogma that Muhammad could not write, which was an important part of the proof of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ân."[1] He also cites 'Abd Allah ibn Shaddâd's report given in Al-Tabarî's *tafsîr* saying that that "text requires that the *mâ* be taken as 'what', since it is preceded by 'and'."[2]

In the second paragraph Watt reproduces Bell's views that the words *qara'a* and *qur'ân* are taken from the religious vocabulary of the Syrian Christians and that Qur'ân means "reading" and "Scripture lesson".[3] Watt adds that while the verb *'iqra'* "later came to mean "read", in this *sûrah* it presumably means 'recite from memory', namely, from the memory of what had been supernaturally communicated to him."[4]

Then, in the last paragraph of his text under this sub-heading Watt says that there "are no effective objections to the almost universal view of Muslim scholars that this is the first of the Qur'ân to be revealed". He then interprets this passage as "a command to worship" and, differing from Bell, who says that the passage was revealed when the Prophet had already gathered some followers, says that "it may very well belong to a stage before he began to preach to others." Nevertheless, insists Watt, the "possibility cannot be excluded" that the Prophet "had already received other passages which he did not regard as part of the Qur'ân; one example would be the words in the traditions "Thou art the Messenger of God."[5]

Now, as regards the first point, it is clear that all that Watt says in this connection is indeed to discredit the fact that the Prophet could not read or write. The question of his illiteracy and the orientalists' views about it, including the views of Watt, have already been discussed.[6] It may only be pointed out here that

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[1] *Ibid.*, 46.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 47, citing Bell, *Origin etc.*, 90 ff.
[4] Watt, *op.cit.*, 47.
[5] *Ibid.*

the allegation of the later traditionists' having avoided what is called the "natural meaning" of the words *mâ 'aqra'u* is totally unwarranted. Nor is it a fact that the so-called "dogma" about the Prophet's illiteracy is a later development. The Qur'ân itself states: *wa ma kunta tatlû min qablihi min kitâb wa lâ takhuṭṭuhu bi-yamînika idhan lartâba al-mubtilûn* , meaning: "You were not used before this (i.e. the giving out of the Qur'ân) to reading any book, nor to writing it with your right hand. In that case the detractors could have reason for doubting." (29:48). What is called the "dogma" about the Prophet's illiteracy is thus based on this and other clear statements of the Qur'ân itself. The dogma is *in no way* a later invention. Also, it is not true to say that the later traditionists avoided the so-called natural meaning of the words. Many of them indeed considered the different versions and the differences in the meanings of the expressions. Watt himself, as seen a little earlier, cites one such different meaning given in the commentary of Al-Ṭabarî. Watt's insistence of what he calls the natural meaning of the words seems to have arisen from a confusion about the negative *mâ* and the interrogative *mâ* in the two versions.

What Watt says in his first paragraph is in effect rendered irrelevant by what he says in his second paragraph dealing with the origin and meaning of *'iqra'*. We need not dilate here on the question whether the terms *'iqra'* and Qur'ân are derived from the religious vocabulary of the Syrian Christians. Even according to Bell, whom he quotes, Qur'ân means "reading" or "Scripture lesson". But if, as Watt would have us believe, the verb *'iqra'* only "later came to mean 'read'", and if this passage of *sûrat al-'alaq* is only a command to the Prophet to "recite from memory" what "had been communicated to him supernaturally", then the whole of Watt's previous remarks about the Prophet's illiteracy and the allegations against the traditionists are both irrelevant and unnecessary; for no reading or writing capacity is called for if the task is simply to recite from memory. Obviously, Watt first assumes the meaning of reading for the verb and on that basis makes his above mentioned comments. He then changes his ground, rejects that meaning for the word and suggests that it only means a command to recite from memory, etc. Once again, he does not explain how Muḥammad (p.b.h.) received the supernatural communications prior to the communication of the *'iqra'* passage, and what were those supposed pre-*'iqra'* passages or "messages for the passages" that were required to be recited from memory. Clearly, Watt simply

[1] *Supra*, pp. 15-25.

reiterates in another form the old assumption of the receipt of revelations by the Prophet prior to what is called the "vision".

But once again Watt somewhat contradicts in his third paragraph what he says in the second. He states that there is no effective objections to the view that the *'iqra'* passage was the first of the Qur'ân to be revealed. A strict adherence to this statement requires the rejection of the suggestion that there were pre-*'iqra'* passages revealed to the Prophet. Watt seems to have recognized the difficulty arising out of this last statement of his. Hence he attempts to escape from it in two ways. He interprets the passage to mean that it formed "a command to worship" and that it may "very well belong to a stage before" the Prophet began to preach to others. Secondly, Watt insists at the end of the paragraph that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) had of course "already received other messages which he did not regard as part of the Qur'ân", an example of that being the words "Thou art the Messenger of God".[1] This last statement is obviously an attempt to side-track the issue. The discussion here is about the receipt of pre-*'iqra'* passages or messages that formed part of the Qur'ân and that the Prophet was supposedly asked in the *'iqra'* passage to recite from memory, and not about what Watt recognizes to be no part of the Qur'ân ('reading' or 'Scripture lesson'). Moreover, if *waḥy*, as he and his preceptor Bell suggest, was only "inspiration" or "suggestion" for a "practical line of conduct" which the Prophet in fact followed, that could not conceivably be something to be "recited from memory"! The climax of contradictions comes, however, a couple of pages subsequently in Watt's work where he states that the "vision" and the address "Thou art the Messenger of God" took place not before the revelation of the *'iqra'* passage but some three years *after* the "original call" which, as Watt says here, is described in his passage B of Al-Zuhrî's account!

E. "*SÛRAT AL-MUDDATHTHIR*: THE *FATRAH*"

Watt then passes on to his fifth sub-title. He starts this section by referring to Jâbir ibn 'Abd Allah al-'Ansârî's tradition which says that the opening *'âyahs* of *sûrat al-Muddaththir* were the first revelation. Watt states that this could have been so only "if Muhammad entered abruptly on his public ministry without any period of preparation"; for the passage contains the words "Rise and Warn", whereas the *'iqra'* passage does not contain any such directive and does not therefore "imply a public ministry". He therefore observes that "the most

[1] Watt, *op.cit.*, 47.

probable view" is that the passage of *sûrat al-Muddaththir* "marks the beginning of public ministry". In support of this statement he cites what Ibn Isḥâq says that the Prophet was ordered after three years of his commission to declare openly what had come to him from Allah.[1] As another evidence Watt refers to the tradition which says that for the first three years it was the angel "Asrafil" [Isrâfîl] who, in Watt's word, "mediated" the revelation to the Prophet. In this connection Watt refers to "fatrah or gap in the revelation" and says that "az-Zuhrî introduces the *fatrah* in order to reconcile this tradition with the view that *sûrat al-'alaq* came first."[2]

The distinction made by Watt between the "non-public ministry" and "public ministry" is clearly based on the distinction made by the Muslim scholars between *nubuwwah* (call to Prophethood) and *risâlah* (commission to preach). Muslim scholarly opinion is also more or less unanimous in saying that the opening passage of *sûrat al-Muddaththir* marks the inception of *risâlah*. But the identification of this distinction with what Ibn Isḥâq says about open preaching and with the Isrâfîl tradition is misleading. Ibn Isḥâq's statement is made not with reference to the distinction between *nubuwwah* and *risâlah* but with reference to what he suggests to be the initial period of unobtrusive or private preaching followed by the period of open preaching. The work of preaching is implied in both the periods. Nor does he relate his statement with the revelation of *sûrat al-Muddaththir* but with two other passages of the Qur'ân (i.e., 15:94 and 26:214). It may be noted that his characterization of the initial period as a period of secret preaching is not based on any specific authority, but on the vague assertion of "what we have come to know" (*fî mâ balaghanâ*). Both aspects of his statement, namely, the nature of the initial period of preaching and its length need re-examination in the light of the other relevant facts.

Watt makes a mistake in taking Ibn Isḥâq's statement as having been made with reference to the distinction between what is called "non-public ministry" and "public ministry". He seems to realize the difficulty arising out of this identification. Hence he states that "the precise nature of the difference" between the two, that is non-public and public ministry, "is more difficult to say, since the first converts are said to have been made during the first period." There is in fact no difficulty in the matter. The difficulty is created by Watt's own faulty identification and, to a greater extent, by a faulty English rendering of the

[1] *Ibid.*, 48. See also IBN HISHÂM, I, 262.

[2] Watt, *op.cit.*, 48.

essentially technical terms *nubuwwah* and *risâlah* as "non-public ministry" and "public ministry" respectively. It is to be noted that *nubuwwah* is no "ministry" as such. The use of this term only illustrates the risk involved in transferring Christian theological terms to technical Islamic expressions.

The reference to the Isrâfîl tradition in this connection is also inappropriate. Whatever the tradition in question is worth, it relates neither to the distinction between *nubuwwah* and *risâlah* nor to what is called the period of secret preaching. It is also misleading to state, as Watt does, that the angel Isrâfîl used to "mediate", i.e., deliver, revelation to the Prophet for the first three years of his commission. The text of the tradition simply says that Isrâfîl was "attached" (*qurina bi*) to the Prophet. There is no mention that that angel used to bring any *waḥy*. On the contrary it is specifically mentioned that the angel was so attached to the Prophet *prior* to the coming of *waḥy* (*qabla 'an yûḥâ 'ilayhi*).[1] The tradition in question is, however, *mursal*, i.e., its authority does not go up to the time of the Prophet. Al-Wâqidî, who also mentions this tradition, categorically states that it is not reliable.[2]

Having thus spoken of the distinction between the "non-public" and "public ministry" Watt deals with the term *al-Muddaththir*. He says that it is commonly taken to mean "wrapped in *dithâr* (or *dathâr*), that is , a cloak" and that it had some connection with the receiving of revelations. As such, he observes, the act of being wrapped "may either be to induce revelations, or, more probably, to protect the human recipient from the danger of Divine appearance." It must at once be pointed out that in none of the traditions is the act of being wrapped indicated to be what is called a means of "inducing revelations" or "to protect the human recipient from the danger of the Divine appearance." Watt simply twists the term to import in it the theory of "inducing revelations" and of "the vision of God".

More remarkable is Watt's suggestion about the metaphorical meaning of *al-Muddathir.* He says that it means "a man who is obscure and of no reputation" and attempts to substantiate this implication by referring to what he calls "the standards by which the rich Meccans judged" him as "a comparatively unimportant person."[3] The allusion is obviously to the Qur'ânic passage 43:31 wherein reference is made to the rich Makkans' attempt to belittle the Prophet when he began to preach the truth to them. True, he was not one of the leaders

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[1] AL-ṬABARÎ, *Târîkh*, I, 1249.
[2] IBN SA'D, I, 191. Also quoted in AL-ṬABARÎ, *op.cit.*
[3] Watt, *op.cit.*,49.

of his society when "the call" took place; but the term *al-Muddaththir* by no means implies "an obscure person". Nor was he in any way an "obscure" person before "the call". It is common knowledge that a cognate word may acquire a metaphorical sense. The rule in such a case is that the metaphorical meaning is strictly confined to the particular form, and not to any other form or derivative from the root, since the root word does not have that sense. Now, one of the forms derived from *dathar* is *dathûr*. This form does sometime bear the sense of an obscure person;[1] but it would be a violence to the rules of the language to transfer that sense to another derivation such as *muddaththir*. In none of the standard Arabic dictionaries is that sense given to this form. Moreover, it is quite contrary to common sense that in the *'âyah* under reference Allah would address His Messenger in such a derogatory term, or that the Prophet would apply it to himself!

Thus having dealt with the question of "non-public" and "public ministry", the period of *fatrah* and the meaning of *al-muddaththir* Watt "summarizes" the "picture" as follows. He says that there was a "preparatory stage in Muhammad's career as prophet, lasting three years." During this period he received the first part of *sûrat al-'Alaq*, *sûrat al-Ḍuḥâ* and other revelations of "a more private character". Watt again refers here to the Isrâfîl tradition. He then says that the *fatrah* might be placed at the end of this period and that then the "visions" or the first of them took place, together with the giving of the title "Messenger of God" and the revelation of *sûrat al-Muddaththir*.[2]

Thus does Watt completely reverse the position with which he started. He started by saying that *al-ru'yâ al-ṣâdiqah* in the pre-Ḥirâ' period was the same type of "vision" as that experienced by the Prophet subsequently. Then Watt says that the "vision" at Ḥirâ', which is described in passage B of Al-Zuhrî's account, was a "vision of God" because, among other things, there is the mention of *al-ḥaqq* in that connection, which he interprets as a reference to God. Then he states that passage B describes the "original call" and implies that the "vision" was something independent of "the call", taking place subsequently and that its purport was something general, namely, reassuring the Prophet of his new position and imparting to him the conviction that "the passages were messages from God". Yet, on the basis of this supposed purport of the "vision" Watt says that it would "fit in well with passage B", thereby once again implying that the

[1] See *Tâj al-'Arûs*, III, 202.
[2] WATT, *op.cit*, 49.

subject matter of that passage is "the vision" and that it was incidental to "the original call". It is also on that basis that he asserts, a little while ago, that the address "Thou art the Messenger of God" was the sort of non-Qur'ânic revelation which the Prophet had received prior to the receipt of the *'iqra'* passage. And now Watt completely reverses the position saying that even the "first" vision took place after three years of the Prophet's career as such and that the title Messenger of God was given then, that is, the communication "Thou art the Messenger of God" took place not before that of the *'iqra'* passage but long after it!

These confusion and inconsistencies could easily have been averted if Watt had not set his mind from the start to prove that the so-called "vision" and also *waḥy* were only matters of the Prophet's mind and intellect, for which purpose Watt has divided Al-Zuhrî's rather continuous account into so many artificial passages and, among other devices, has equated *nubuwwah* and *risâlah* with "non-public ministry" and "public ministry" respectively, identifying the former with the so-called period of secret preaching mentioned by Ibn Ishâq and with the dubious period of Isrâfîl's alleged companionship with the Prophet. It is because of this wrong identification that Watt finds it difficult to understand the real nature of what he calls the period of non-public ministry because there were "conversions before Muhammad publicly claimed to be God's Messenger". And on account of this difficulty of his own creation Watt proceeds to entertain "suspicion that too much is ascribed to the preparatory stage in the traditional accounts."[1] If Watt had not attempted to misinterpret and "tendentially" shape the sources for the above mentioned purpose he could have seen that despite the variations in the reports "the call" and "the vision" took place simultaneously, that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* was verbal communication of specific texts, that the *fatrah* or pause in the coming of *waḥy* was an event of the initial period, that it lasted not for years but only for days or weeks and that the *risâlah* or commission to preach and the revelation of *surat al-Muddaththir* and other *sûrahs* took place not very long after the original call. There is thus no need to be suspicious about the conversions that took place during the first three years or so of the Prophet's career.

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[1] *Ibid.*

F. "MUHAMMAD'S FEAR AND DESPAIR"

Watt next passes on to his sixth sub-title given above. He starts by saying that "the passages from az-Zuhrî" speak of two types of fear and despair. "Firstly, fear because of the appearance or presence of the Divine (C, F, J); and despair which led to thoughts of suicide (D, I)."[1]

Before proceeding further with Watt's other statements in this connection it should be observed at the outset that the passages, though they undoubtedly speak about "fear", do in no way speak about "the appearance or presence of the Divine." Passage J, for instance, which Watt cites here as indicating the appearance of the Divine, unequivocally says, in Watt's own translation. "...I saw the angel who used to come to me at Hirâ' on a throne (*kursî*) between the heaven and the earth. I was stricken with fear of him."[2] Therefore it was the sight of the angel, not of the Divine, which caused the fear. It would be manifestly inconsistent to adduce the evidence of the passage in speaking of the "appearance" or "presence" which caused fear and then to assume, in disregard of the clear statement of that very passage, that the entity appearing was something else. Secondly, in interpreting the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* Watt states, as we have seen, that while Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) eyes saw "one of the greatest signs of his Lord", the "heart perceived the thing symbolized". We have pointed out the mistake in this interpretation; but according to Watt's own admission, what the Prophet had seen with his eyes was a "sign" or "symbol" of the Divine, not the Divine Being Himself. It was this physical sight, this ocular experience, of the great sign or symbol of the Divine, i.e., the angel, which caused the fear. After all, what is spiritual or intellectual, or what the "heart perceived", could not have been a matter for fear. Thirdly, both Bell and Watt say that the Prophet, after having mistakenly claimed to have had a "vision" of God, subsequently modified his position not only in *sûrat al-Najm* but also elsewhere holding that human sight cannot reach God. Now, the passages from Al-Zuhrî, whether regarded as a narration of 'Â'ishah's or others', are obviously subsequent to the supposed modification of his position by the Prophet. Hence neither 'Â'ishah (r.a.) nor any other reporter could have got the impression that the "vision" was in any way that of God. To interpret the passages as giving that impression would thus be simply anachronistic.

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1 *Ibid.*, 48.
2 *Ibid.*, 49-50.

To proceed with Watt's other statements. He says in connection with the question of fear caused supposedly by the appearance or presence of the Divine that according to the testimony of the Old Testament the fear of the near approach of the Divine has deep roots in the Semitic consciousness. The passages C and J which mention this fear, he observes, "seem to be mainly" explanations of the expression *al-muzzammil* in 73:1 and they suggest "that the later exegetes were merely inferring the presence of fear from the Qur'ân, and had no information about it apart from the Qur'ân."[1] Watt further says that the "awkward transition from *zammiluni* to *muddaththir*" shows that the exegetes inferred the connection of *al-muzzammil*, which was not originally so, with the story of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) call. If, therefore, argues Watt, "it seemed natural to these later exegetes to take *muzzammil* in this way, this fear of the onset of the Divine must have been widespread" and the Prophet "may well have shared in it."[2]

Now, Watt says that the later exegetes merely inferred "the presence of fear from the Qur'ân, and had no information about it apart from the Qur'an". There is, however, no indication whatsoever in the Qur'ân about the fear. All that the *surahs al-Muzzammil* and *al-Muddaththir* indicate is that the Prophet was addressed by these titles and asked either to get up and pray at night or to rise up and warn, etc. Even *sûrat al-Najm*, which speaks of the "vision", does not contain any indication of the Prophet's having been at any time struck with fear. How could the later exegetes then have inferred "the presence of fear from the Qur'ân" if they "had no information about it apart from the Qur'ân"? The fact is that Watt here implicitly slips into Bell's view that the traditions are fabrications of a later age to explain the Qur'ânic statements. At the same time Watt founds his remarks on the fact of fear, information about which is supplied only by the traditions and not at all by the Qur'ân. Watt's argument is, however, fallacious and round-about. It was the late exegetes who had no information about the fear, who inferred it from the Qur'ân and also inferred the connection of the expression *muzzammil* with the story of the Prophet's "call", and since they made this inference, the "fear of the onset of the Divine" must have been "wide-spread"; and as it was supposedly wide-spread, "Muhammad may well have shared in it." Clearly Watt here first makes an unwarranted and incorrect assumption and then argues backward on the basis of that assumption to prove the existence of widespread

[1] *Ibid.*, 50.
[2] *Ibid.*

fear at the "onset" or "near-approach" of the Divine in which the Prophet might have shared. In thus arguing Watt in effect turns the table on his preceptor Bell; for the latter would have us believe that Muhammad (p.b.h.) in his "ignorance" initially "claimed" that he had a vision of God; but Watt now tells us that the notion of the onset or near-approach of the Divine and the attendant fear was "widespread" and that the Prophet only shared in it!

We are not, however, concerned here with the Old Testament testimony about the matter. We should only point out that in the second and third centuries of Islam, when the exegetes are alleged to have invented the traditions to provide explanations for the Qur'ânic statements, the so-called Old Testament notion and fear about the onset of the Divine could hardly have been prevailing, not to speak of being widespread, in the Islamic land. And for the reasons mentioned above, these exegetes could not have conceived the idea of a "vision" of God, particularly as both Bell and Watt themselves take care to note that the "Islamic orthodoxy" about it had already been crystallized by then. Nor can one conceivably read back a supposedly widespread third-century notion into a period prior even to the onset of that era.

As regards the second theme, namely, "despair" leading to "thoughts of suicide" Watt finds also its parallel "among the Old Testament prophets and from the lives of the Christian saints." To substantiate this parallelism he quotes what A. Poulain reproduces from St. Teresa of Avila's feeling as to "whether the locutions" she received "came from the devil or from the imagination" etc.[1] Watt then observes that the thought of suicide could hardly have been attributed to Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "unless he said something which gave a basis" for it and that such "a period of despair would fit in with the accounts of the *fatrah*."[2]

The analogy drawn here by Watt is completely inappropriate; for the statement of St. Teresa of Avila, which he quotes from A. Poulain's work, speaks only of her having hovered between faith and doubt as to whether the locutions she received were from God, from the devil or from imagination and of her at last being convinced that they were from God, "which she would have died to defend." The "despair" which could be dimly discerned here relates to the doubt about the real origin of the "locutions". Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) despair, on the other hand, was not at all due to any doubts about the origin of what he had received, but solely because the coming of that thing had temporarily stopped.

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[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*

His case is thus completely different from that of St Teresa of Avila. The analogy drawn by Watt with the Old Testament prophets and Christian saints seems to be purposeful; for, as we shall presently see, he ultimately suggests that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* is comparable to the "inspiration" of the Christian prophets and saints - they received the "inspiration", that is ideas and thoughts, from God and then wrote down in their own words what they had understood from the "inspiration". Needless to point out, the concept of Qur'ânic *waḥy* is totally different. Incidentally, the quotation given here by Watt from A Poulain's work appears to be another step towards using that writer's matrix to cast Qur'ânic *waḥy* into it, as Watt eventually does.

As regards the remark that Muhammad (p.b.h.) must have said something which provided a basis for the attribution of the thought of suicide to him, it has already been seen[1] that this statement of Al-Zuhrî's is a conjecture on his part. Even Watt recognizes that Al-Zuhrî's statement in connection with the *fatrah* is his "conjecture".[2] The *fatrah* and the Prophet's despair on account of that are of course facts. His having mentioned this despair and his frequenting the hills in expectation of again meeting the angel appear to have provided the basis for this conjecture. Whatever might have been the duration of the *fatrah* and the intensity of the Prophet's despair on that account, they both emphatically illustrate the fact that *waḥy* was not something emanating from his own consciousness – it was none of his imaginative/intellectual locution. Had it been so, there would have been no *fatrah* and no resultant despair.

G. "ENCOURAGEMENT FROM KHADÎJAH AND WARAQAH"

Under this last sub-heading Watt stresses first that there is "no reason for rejecting the account of how Khadîjah reassured Muhammad". It shows, continues Watt, that "Muhammad was lacking in self-confidence at this stage". He further says, contradicting in effect Bell's view on the subject, that "there is no strong reason" for doubting the authenticity of the phrase about the *nâmûs*. Its use, "instead of the Qur'ânic Tawrah", argues Watt, is an argument for its genuineness. Watt then says that the reassurance from Waraqah was important. It encouraged Muḥammad (p.b.h.) to "put the highest construction on his experiences". As such it was "of great importance in his interior development." It also shows that initially he "was of a hesitant nature". The rest of the story,

[1] *Supra*, p.
[2] WATT, *op.cit.*, 49.

observes Watt, "seems to be an attempt to explain why Waraqah, though he approved Muhammad, did not become a Muslim."[1]

It has already been pointed out[2] that the use of the expression *nâmûs* is rather a conclusive evidence in favour of the genuineness of the account. Watt does not explain why the subsequent narrators or reporters should have been interested in defending Waraqah and in explaining why he did not become a Muslim. If they had really added to or modified the account, they would more naturally have done so in respect of those aspects of it that, as Watt states, show the Prophet to be "lacking in self-confidence" and "of a hesitant nature". The fact is that neither the one nor the other part of the account is a later addition "from inference or imagination". The account as a whole illustrates the fact that, whatever might have been the motive behind the Prophet's solitary stay at Ḥirâ', and whatever might have been the nature of *taḥannuth*, the coming of *waḥy* was unexpected and surprising to him and that he did neither plan nor make any preparations for giving himself out as a Prophet.

Like Bell, Watt thinks that the word *nâmûs* is derived from *nomos* and means "the law or revealed scriptures". Waraqah's remarks, says Watt, would thus have been made after Muḥammad (p.b.h.) "had started to receive revelations" and they meant that what had come to him "was to be identified or at least classed with the Jewish or Christian scriptures" and that he "should be founder or legislator of a community."[3]

Waraqah's remarks were of course made after the Prophet had received the first revelation, not "revelations". Had he already received a number of revelations he would have been familiarised with the affair, the initial surprise or uncertainty would have been over and there would have been no reason for his going to Waraqah for consultation. On the other hand, if Waraqah had meant to say what Watt thinks he had meant, then there were deeper reasons for his doing so. It is just not conceivable that an intelligent, knowledgeable and experienced individual like Waraqah, after only listening to an unusual story from a junior acquaintance and relative of his, would jump to the conclusion that a law or scripture comparable to those of the Jews and Christians had started coming to him. Waraqah must have been sure of two things before he made the reported remarks. He must have got an impression from a study of the old scriptures that

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[1] *Ibid.*, 51.

[2] *Supra*, pp.

[3] WATT, *op.cit.*, 51.

they contained indications of the coming of another Messenger and of other revelations upon him. Waraqah must also have been convinced, from a knowledge of the character and antecedent of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) that he possessed the quality of being such a Messenger. Hence, when he disclosed his unusual experience to Waraqah, he immediately came to the conclusion that what he had learnt from the old scriptures had come to pass and that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) the faithful, the trustworthy and the truthful was the recipient of that divine commission and revelation.

Whatever the origin and meaning of the term *nâmûs*, it , as used by Waraqah, had no doubt reference to what had come to Muḥammad (p.b.h.); and that reference was not simply to the "words" he had received, but also to the unusual circumstance in which they had been received. This unusual circumstance was the appearance of the entity who had delivered the words. It was this "appearance" which caused Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) surprise and bewilderment and which brought him and his wife to the wise man of the community in search of an explanation. Had Muḥammad (p.b.h.) simply "heard" the words, or had it been an "interior locution", imaginative or intellectual, there would hardly have been any reason for surprise and fear. The "appearance" or "vision" is thus the central feature of the beginning of "the call". *Nâmûs* had reference to this *feature* as well as to the words that were received.

Waraqah's use of the expression *nâmûs* is significant in another respect. It is clear from all the accounts that the very first persons to whom Muḥammad (p.b.h.) disclosed his unusual experience were Khadîjah (r.a.) and Waraqah. Had he "claimed" or "interpreted" or supposed his "vision" to be one of God, Waraqah, with his knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, would have straightway dismissed it as imagination and mistake and would not have left it for Muḥammad (p.b.h.) or for any twentieth century scholar to subsequently find out the mistake. Nor is *nâmûs*, whatever its origin and meaning, applicable to a vision of God".

After having stressed the importance of Waraqah's reassurance Watt says that the concluding words of the "first" revelation, "Who taught by the pen, Taught man what he did not know", refer "almost certainly" to "previous revelations". By "previous revelations" Watt means the Old and the New Testament and argues that there is no point in telling the Prophet that God "taught the use of pen" if he could neither read nor write. And since he was in close contact with Waraqah

who "is outstanding for his study of the Christian scriptures", Muḥammad (p.b.h) had learnt from him "much of a general character". When, therefore, he repeated the passage it must "have reminded him of what he owed to Waraqah." "Later Islamic conceptions", concludes Watt, may have been largely moulded by Waraqah's ideas, e.g. of the relation of Muḥammad's revelation to previous revelations."[1]

There is rarely any orientalist who, whenever there is an occasion to refer to the well-known story of the Prophet's consultation with Waraqah after the receipt of the first revelation, fails to make use of it for pressing the view that the former learnt much from the latter for producing the Qur'ân and Islam. That general theme of borrowing from the previous religious systems, particularly from Judaism and Christianity, has already been dealt with.[2] Here we may only make some observations on Watt's above mentioned remarks. The statement "Who taught by the pen" or "Who taught the use of pen" (there is very little difference in the sense in the two forms of translation) is not meant simply to emphasize that particular skill. The passages as a whole stress man's origin and creation on the one hand, and the most important element in his mental and intellectual development, namely, his knowledge and intelligence. Nothing could be a better start for the revelation than to remind man that he owed his origin and creation, as well as the quality which distinguished him from the rest of the creation, his knowledge and intelligence, to Allah Alone. In this sense the mention of pen here is figurative. On the other hand, it also signifies that what was being revealed to the Prophet was the beginning of a "scripture" which was to be preserved and transmitted by means of reading and recitation as well by means of the pen, it mattered not whether the Prophet himself possessed the skill of writing or not. Watt's main argument here, however, leads us nowhere. If the *'iqra'* passage, as Watt suggests, only reminded Muḥammad (p.b.h.) when he repeated it "of what he owed to Waraqah", then there would have been no reason for his going to Waraqah for an explanation of the whole matter. On the other hand, if Waraqah had taught so many things, he would not have made the remarks he did; he would simply have said that this was what he had so long been teaching Muḥammad (p.b.h.) and that he had after all realized the truth. While suggesting that the Prophet had learnt a good deal from Waraqah, Watt and the other orientalists do not ask themselves this simple question: Why should Waraqah have been privy to

[1] *Ibid.*, 51-52.
[2] *Supra*, Chapter II.

Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) plans for producing a new scripture and a new religion? They seem to have avoided also the question whether it would not have been far more sensible on the Prophet's part to learn reading and thus himself acquire a knowledge of the old scriptures and make his own plans and preparations, than to let others know his secrets? Again, if "later Islamic conceptions", such as "the relation of Muhammad's revelation to previous revelations" were moulded by Waraqah's ideas, such ideas the latter must have obtained from his study of the previous scriptures. The Islamic conception would thus be only in line with the teachings of the Old and the New Testament, and in that case the orientalists should find no difficulty in acknowledging the truth and reasonableness of the particular concept, namely, the fundamental unity and relationship of all the revealed scriptures. If by "later Islamic conceptions" is meant that the conception of the "relation of Muhammad's revelation to previous revelations" was developed after the time of the Prophet, then the statement would be totally wrong; for that relationship is very much emphasized in the Qur'ân itself, and that also in such an early passage as 87:18-19 which clearly states: "Verily this is in the early scriptures, the scriptures of Ibrâhîm and Mûsâ." If, on the other hand, by "later" is meant that the Prophet subsequently related his "revelation to previous revelations", then the point is very much admitted by himself, and there is no need to take all the troubles to prove it. In fact, the need is far more to look into the question of what he claimed to be different or new in the revelation he had received or claimed that what he had received was also contained in the past revelations but had been lost on account of human fault or error.

CHAPTER VII
THE ORIENTALISTS ON THE QUR'ÂNIC *WAḤY*: IV. WATT'S THEORY OF INTELLECTUAL LOCUTION

In the final section of his treatment of the subject under caption : *The form of Muhammad's prophetic consciousness*, Watt summarises his as well as his predecessors' views. As a preliminary to his doing this he points out the West's awareness since the time of Carlyle of the Prophet's sincerity and, like Bell, stresses the need to "hold firmly to the belief of his sincerity until the opposite is conclusively proved." He then expresses his intention to remain neutral with regard to the different views about the Qur'ân held by the orthodox Muslim, the Western secularist and the modern Christian, saying that he would, out of courtesy, use the expression "the Qur'ân says" and not "Muhammad says", but if he speaks "of a passage being revealed to Muhammad" this should not be taken as an acceptance of the Muslim point of view and the reader should "supply 'as the Muslims say' or some such phrase'."[1]

I. WATT'S MATRIX: A. POULAIN'S THEORY

After these preliminaries Watt introduces A. Poulain's definitions of "locution" and "vision" as given in his book *Graces of Interior Prayer*.[2] According to that writer, says Watt, "locution" and "vision" may each be either "exterior" or "interior". "Exterior locutions" are "words heard by the ear, though not produced naturally." Similarly "exterior visions" are "visions of material objects, or what seem to be such, perceived by the bodily eyes." "Interior locution" and "interior vision" may each be either "imaginative" or "intellectual". "Imaginative locutions" are received directly by the imaginative sense, without the assistance of the ear. An "intellectual locution", on the other hand, is "a simple communication of thought without words, and consequently without any definite language.[3] With this "equipment" Watt turns "to the Qur'ân and the traditional accounts."

Before seeing how Watt uses this equipment it would be worthwhile to indicate the inherent inconsistency in his approach. He professes to remain neutral with regard to the theological questions and to refrain from expressing any theological opinion. But having said so he immediately turns to what is

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[1] WATT, *M. at M.*, 52-53.
[2] London, 1928.
[3] Watt, *op.cit.*,54, citing A. Poulain's work.

avowedly a book on "mystical theology" dealing essentially with "interior" prayer and the experiences of Christian saints and mystics in order to explain Qur'ânic *waḥy* or what he calls "the form of Muhammad's prophetic consciousness". Secondly, he declares that he would not deny "any fundamental Islamic belief". In practice, however, he immediately proceeds to do just the opposite thing, that is to show that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* fits in with A. Poulain's definition of "intellectual locution", that is, it is a "simple communication of thought without words", etc. This is nothing but a denial of, if not an affront to, the most fundamental Islamic belief that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* is *not* a form of Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) consciousness, normal or supra-normal. The fact is that Watt has introduced A. Poulain's equipment only to prove the usual Christian missionary and orientalist point of view, more particularly the view of Bell, but only in an intellectual garb. It is understandable that a believing Christian cannot conscientiously subscribe to the Muslim point of view. But being no doubt aware of what he actually wanted to do it would have been better for Watt if he had not committed himself to neutrality and undertaken not to deny any fundamental Islamic belief.

II. WATT'S APPLICATION OF THE THEORY CONSIDERED

Having introduced Poulain's definition Watt refers briefly to the "manners" (*kayfiyât*) of revelation as mentioned in Al-Suyûṭî's *Itqân*[1] and other sources and says that the main types are described, however, in the Qur'ânic passage 42:50-52. He translates this passage as: "It belongeth not to any human being that God should speak to him except by suggestion (*waḥyan*) or from behind a veil, or sending a messenger to suggest (*fa-yûḥiya*) by His permission what He pleaseth.... Thus We have suggested to thee a spirit belonging to Our affair (*awḥaynâ*)."[2]

"The first manner therefore", continues Watt, "is where God speaks by *waḥy*". He then states three things. He refers to Bell who, it is said, after studying the various uses of the term *waḥy* in the Qur'ân has shown that at least in its early portions the word means not verbal communication of a text, but "suggestion", "prompting" or "inspiration" coming into a person's mind. Secondly, Watt says that for "most of the Meccan period" *waḥy* was "the work of the Spirit". He cites in support of this statement the Qur'ânic passage 26:192-194 which he translates as: "Verily it is the revelation (*tanzîl*) of the Lord of the Worlds, With which has come down (*nazala bi-hi*) the Faithful Spirit Upon thy heart, that thou mayest be

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[1] JALÂL AL-DÎN AL-SUYÛṬÎ, *Al-Itqân Fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*.

[2] WATT, *op.cit*, 54.

of those who warn." Watt adds here that the mention of angels bearing a message "is apparently later". Thirdly, he says that so far as he has noticed there is no mention "during the Meccan period" of "the Prophet 'hearing' what is brought down to him." On these grounds Watt says that "the Spirit" introduced "the message into Muhammad's heart and mind by some method other than speaking to him" and that this would then be "an interior locution, and probably an intellectual one".[1]

Now, the passage 42:51-52 does indeed describe the main manners in which Allah communicates His words to His chosen men. Watt's translation of this passage is, however, both inaccurate and misleading. The rendering of *waḥy* and *awḥa* as "suggestion" and "suggested" is, as we have seen[2], wrong. Watt does well to refer here to Bell and his conclusion about the meaning of the term *waḥy*. We have already discussed his article in detail and have shown that his suggestion of "suggestion" etc. being the meaning of the term is very much wrong and inapplicable in the case of Qur'ânic *waḥy*. That the expression "suggestion" cannot be appropriate in every place where the term *waḥy* or its derivatives occur would be evident even from the passage which Watt has translated here. Thus, even if for argument's sake we employ "suggestion" for *waḥyan* in the first clause of the passage, the same expression cannot be accurate in translating *fa yûḥiya* in the second clause, i.e, "by sending a messenger to suggest (?) by His permission...." In this latter case what the messenger does, because he is only a messenger and not a delegate or deputy, is really not that he "suggests" but only conveys or delivers what is Allah's *waḥy*. Thus *yûḥiya* in this instance means "conveys" or "delivers" and not "suggests", as Watt translates it. He is also confusing in translating *'âyah* 52 as "Thus We have suggested to thee a spirit belonging to Our affair"." How a "spirit belonging to Our affair" could be "suggested" is not easily understandable. Nor would the meaning of the expression be clear. The meaning of the phrase *min 'amrinâ* here is "by Our command". But even if we accept Watt's translation of this expression, *rûḥ* here is admittedly the object of the verb *'awḥaynâ,* that is *rûḥ* is something which has been *waḥy*-ied. In other words, *ruḥ* here means *waḥy* as object, not as verb. The nature of the object is clarified in the concluding part of the *'âyah* which runs: "You did not know what the Book is, nor the faith, but We have made it a light wherewith We guide whomsoever of Our servants We will..."[3] This explanatory clause shows

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[1] *Ibid.*, 55.
[2] *Supra*, pp. 125 ff.

clearly that the *rûḥ* mentioned previously is the Book, i.e., the text of the Book (Qur'ân), which was *waḥy*-ied to the Prophet.

As regards Watt's second argument that for the most of the Makkan period *waḥy* was the "work of the Spirit" and that angels are mentioned as messengers "apparently" later, he is mistaken in two ways. His citing of the passage 26:192-194 in this connection shows that he has misunderstood the sense of the passage as a whole and also the meaning of "the faithful spirit" (*al-rûḥ al-'amîn*). Watt is speaking here about the first manner, i.e., "where God speaks by *waḥy*", and not about the other manners, namely, speaking from "behind the veil" or by "sending a messenger". The passage in question, however, relates to this last mentioned manner, and not at all to the first manner. It appears that Watt has taken "the faithful spirit" here in the sense of God. Hence he has cited the passage as illustrative of the first manner of *waḥy* and has also capitalized the first letters of the words "faithful" and "spirit". In doing so he appears to have imported a theological concept peculiar to Christianity into the explanation of a Qur'ânic expression. He disregards or fails to understand the implication of the first *'âyah* of the passage under reference. It speaks of the Qur'ân as a *tanzîl*, i.e., something "sent-down", and the sender is the "Lord of the Worlds". The next *'âyah* mentions the agency which brought it down – "with which hath come down (*nazala bi-hi*) the faithful spirit". The "faithful spirit" is thus the messenger who brought it down. Incidentally, it may be observed that Watt has translated the word *tanzîl*, which clearly stands here for the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, as "revelation", apparently because he cannot by any stretch of the imagination apply the word "suggestion" here. Even his proviso that the reader should supply "as the Muslims say" or any such phrase is inapplicable in the present instance.

As regards the expression "faithful spirit" it has already been shown[2] that it is the same as *rasûl karîm* mentioned in 69:40 and 81:19. In the latter passage (i.e. , in 81:21) he is described also as *'amîn*, and that he is very much an angel. This also negatives Watt's claim that "angels" are spoken of as messengers only "later". It should further be noted that nowhere in the Qur'ân is *al-'amîn* (the faithful) mentioned as an attribute or name of God; nor is the adjective "faithful" ever applied to the "spirit" which the Christians consider as an aspect of the Trinity. The term *rûḥ* has been used in the Qur'ân in various senses, namely, spirit of life or soul, angel and, as just seen in 42:50-52, in the sense of *waḥy* as object.

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[1] The text runs as follows:... ما كنت تدري ما الكتاب و لا الايمان و لكن جعلناه نورا نهدى به من نشاء من عبادنا

[2] *Supra*, pp. 120-125; 144-148.

Watt's third argument is that there is no mention in the Makkan period "of the Prophet 'hearing' what is brought down to him." Of course neither in the Makkan nor in the Madinan *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân is there any mention that the Prophet "heard" a revelation. This is so because the Qur'ân is not the Prophet's composition. But if one looks with a little care one would not miss that the author of the Qur'ân, Allah, instructs the Prophet at the very initial stage how to receive revelations and repeatedly asks him to listen carefully to what is recited unto him before hastening to recite and repeat it. "Do not move your tongue in order to hasten with it. It is upon Us (to see to) its recollection and recitation. So when We have it recited, then repeat its recitation/reading." (75:16-18) The same instruction is repeated in 20:114 : "And be not in haste with the Qurân before its communication to you is completed." Of similar import, again, is 87:6: "We shall enable you to recite/read it; so you shall not forget it." These are all early Makkan passages and contain unmistakable exhortations to the Prophet to first listen to the recitation of the Qur'ân (by the angel Jibrîl) and then recite it. Indeed the Qur'ân, as both Bell and Watt recognize, means reading/recitation. Needless to point out that nothing is suitable for reading or recitation, even if from memory, but a specific text. And Allah unequivocally says that He has sent it down as a "recitation/Qur'ân" in Arabic, not as a suggestion to the Prophet to "compose" the Qur'ân – "Verily We have sent it down as a recitation/reading, in Arabic..."[1]

Watt seems to have taken the expression *'alâ qalbika* (upon thy heart) in the passage 26:192-193 to mean that *wahy* was some "suggestion" or idea that came into the Prophet's mind. The expression in question does in no way imply that sense; for it is immediately added that what is delivered is in "clear Arabic tongue" (26:194 *bi-lisânin 'arabiyyin mubîn*), thus removing any ground for doubting the nature of what is delivered. In fact, the expression *'alâ qalbika* is intended to emphasize that the text thus delivered was transfixed in the Prophet's heart, i.e., mind and brain, by Allah's will so that he would not forget it. It has the same sense as is expressed in 75:17 ("It is upon Us its recollection and recitation") and in 87:6 ("We shall enable you to read it, so you shall not forget it"). In fact, "to get by heart " is a familiar English phrase for committing to memory. All our knowledge of mother or foreign tongue, not to speak of any specific text or group of words, is in the ultimate analysis such *getting by heart* of each and every word of the vocabulary, or rather each and every letter of the alphabet of the

[1] Q. 12:2. See also 39:28; 41:3; 42:7 and 43:3.

respective language or languages, as makes us not feel, when we see or use them, that we are merely reproducing them from our memory (i.e. heart). The expression *'alâ qalbika* in the passage under reference has this sense of transfixing in the Prophet's 'heart', and not the sense of "suggestion" or ideas communicated to him.

In connection with this discussion about the first manner of *waḥy* Watt cites the *ḥadîth* of Al-Ḥârith ibn Hishâm[1] in which the Prophet is reported as saying that sometimes *waḥy* used to come to him like the reverberation of a bell (*ṣalṣalat al-jaras*). Watt says that this is "quite compatible" with the first manner and that it was "doubtless an imaginative experience", "an intellectual locution". He further says that there is in this report no mention of the Prophet's "hearing anyone speaking or of hearing words spoken, not even imaginatively. On the contrary, at the end of the experience he appears simply to find the words of the revelation in his heart. It is fairly clear that ... this is a description of an intellectual locution."[2]

It should at once be pointed out that Watt is not quite correct in thus relating this manner of *waḥy* to what he calls the first manner, i.e., *waḥy* coming without the instrumentality of the angel; for in another version of the same report in *Bukhârî* it is specifically mentioned that this was also a manner in which *waḥy* was delivered by the angel.[3] Watt also misstates the case when he says: "The hearing of the bell is doubtless an imaginative experience..." It was no hearing of the bell; it was *waḥy* which the Prophet heard *like the sounding of the bell.* The expression *mithla* (like) used along with *ṣalṣalah* makes this quite clear. Nor was it an "imaginative experience", as Watt terms it; for the Prophet unequivocally mentions that it was "the hardest on me", thereby saying that it was very much a physical experience on his part. The same thing is emphasized by 'Â'isha (r.a.) when she says that she saw him, at the coming down of *waḥy* upon him, "on an extremely cold day, with his forehead running down with perspiration." It is strange that Watt, after having quoted this report verbatim (the words in quotation are his) suggests that it was an "imaginative experience"!

A second grave mistake on Watt's part lies in his statement: "... there is no mention of hearing anyone speaking or of hearing words spoken, not even imaginatively." Now, the material clause here in the report is: *wa qad wa'aytu 'anhu mâ qâla*, which means: "and I committed to memory/got by heart from him what

[1] *Bukhârî*, no.2.
[2] WATT, *op.cit*, 55-56.
[3] *Bukhârî*, no. 3215.

he said." The fact of something having been said to him is thus clearly stated in the report. Watt ignores this significant statement in the report and asserts that "there is no mention" of "anyone speaking" on the occasion. He seems to think that the verb *wa'aytu* does not bear any sense of hearing and that it means simply to understand something within one's own self. This is quite a wrong supposition. The primary meaning of the verb *wa'y* is to hold, to contain, to retain in memory, to remember, to listen carefully and remember, etc.[1] More particularly, when it is used with the expression *mâ qâla* (what he said) it invariably means listening carefully and getting by heart what is said. Watt himself translates the clause as: "... and I have understood from it what He (or "he") said." Even in English, when it is said, "I have understood what he said", it does not exclude hearing of that which is said. In the above noted translation of his, however, Watt commits another mistake. He translates the word *'anhu* in the text as "from it". Obviously he means by "it" what he conceives to be the sound of the bell; but this is not the case. The pronoun *hu* here refers to the angel, not to *ṣalṣalat al-jaras*; for in that case it would have been framed in the feminine form *hâ, ṣalṣalah* being feminine in form.

In fact the verb *wa'â/ya'î* in its various forms is the appropriate term used in *ḥadîth* literature to mean listening carefully and getting by heart what is said or stated by another person. The following three typical instances illustrate this special meaning of the verb.

(a) The famous *ḥadîth* of 'Abû Hurayrah (r.a.) in which he said:

ما كان أحد أعلم بحديث رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم مني من عبد الله بن عمرو فانه كان يكتب بيده و يعي بقلبه
و كنت أعيه بقلبي و لا أكتب بيدي ....

".... None used to know more of the *ḥadîth* of the Messenger of Allah, may peace and blessings of Allah be on him, than me except 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr; for he used to write (it) down with his hand and also get it by heart (*ya'î bi-qalbihi*), while I used to get it by heart (*kuntu 'a'îhi bi-qalbi*) and did not write it with my hand..."[2]

(b) The *ḥadîth* of Khâlid al-'Udwânî (r.a.):

قال فسمعته يقرأ والسماء والطارق حتى ختمها قال فوعيتها في الجاهلية وأنا مشرك ثم قرأتها في الاسلام

"... He said: Thus I heard him [the Prophet] read *Wa al-Samâ' wa al-Târiq* [*sûrah* 86] till he finished it. He said: So I committed it to memory (*wa'aytuhu*) in the state of *jâhiliyyah* while I had been a polytheist; then I recited it in Islam ."[3]

(c) The *ḥadîth* of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd (r.a.):

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[1] See *Lisân al-'Arab*, under *wa'y*, or any standard Arabic-English dictionary, for instance, HANS WEHR, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (ed. J. Milton Cowan), under *wa'y*.

[2] *Musnad*, II, 403.

[3] *Musnad*, IV, 335.

... و قد وعيت عن كل واحد منهم الحديث الذى حدثني ...

"... And I had committed to memory (*wa qad wa'aytu*) from everyone of them the *ḥadîth* which he narrated to me...."[1]

There are many other reports wherein the verb is used specifically to mean listening carefully and retaining in memory what is said.[2] The same sense of the verb is clearly borne out by the Qur'ânic passage 69:12:

....لنجعلها لكم تذكرة و تعيها أذن واعية

"...That We might make it a reminder for you and that the retaining ears might retain it (in remembrance)."

Thus, Watt has erred in understanding the meaning of the verb *wa'aytu* occurring in the report and in supposing that there is no mention in it of anything being said or heard and, further, that the Prophet at the end of the experience "simply found the words of the revelation in his heart." A no less fundamental defect in Watt's treatment of the report is that while it speaks of a single manner of the coming of *waḥy*, he bifurcates the process into two different types of experiences – the one, the so-called "imaginative experience", and the other, the so-called "intellectual locution". The text of the report in no way warrants such bifurcation of the single process. The manner of the coming of *waḥy* spoken of here was neither an imaginative experience nor an intellectual locution. It was very much a physical experience on the Prophet's part and a vocal communication of a text which he heard and retained in memory.

Speaking about the second manner where Allah speaks "from behind a veil" Watt says that this had reference primarily to some early experiences of the Prophet, "such as that in passage B of the material from az-Zuhrî", where "the Truth came to him and said, O Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God."[3] Watt further says that since the words "from behind the veil" suggest that there is no vision of the speaker, it implies that in such a case only the "words are heard, and that therefore this is an imaginative locution (or even an exterior locution)."[4]

In the above mentioned states Watt in effect admits his inconsistency, though he does not seem to realize it. He has so long been utilizing the passage B of Al-Zuhrî's text, particularly the expression "the Truth came to him and said...", as evidence of a "vision of God", or at least an ocular vision of a symbol of God (or

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[1] *Ibid.*,VI, 194.

[2] See for instance, *Bukhârî*, no. 2047; *Tirmidhî*, no. 2658; *Dârimî*, Introduction, p. 24; *Musnad*, II, 161, 475; IV, 254, 366, etc.

[3] WATT, *op.cit.*, 56.

[4] *Ibid.*

probably, as he assumes, a mental or imaginative vision of God). But now he cites the passage to illustrate the manner of Allah's speaking "from behind a veil", i.e., without being seen, and hence it was the case of only hearing the words without a vision – "an imaginative" or "exterior locution". It is indeed difficult to keep pace with Watt's inconsistencies! The only relieving feature is that he quickly adds that this manner "was presumably not common" and conceivably "intended for a description of Moses."[1]

Speaking about the third manner where Allah sends a messenger to deliver *waḥy* Watt says that Muslim scholars think that the messenger was Jibrîl and it was he who brought *waḥy* from the beginning; but Western scholars note that he is not mentioned *by name* in the Qur'ân until the Medinan period, that "there is much" both in the Qur'ân and tradition "that is contrary to the common Muslim view", and that the Muslim view "reads back later conceptions into the earlier period."[2] Watt further says that during the Medinan period revelations by means of Jibrîl might have been common; but even in "such cases the revelation was presumably an imaginative locution", for the mention of Jibrîl coming in the "form of a man" suggests "an imaginative vision."[3]

It may be easily seen that Watt here reiterates the same old plea that Jibrîl is *not mentioned by name in the Qur'ân until the Madinan period and states on that* basis that the Muslim view reads back later conceptions into the earlier period. This specific remark is an exact echo of what Bell says in this connection.[4] This *remark and the statement that the Muslim view is contrary to much of what is* contained in the Qur'ân and tradition are obviously based on the above mentioned plea and also on the other assumptions, namely, (a) that Al-Zuhrî's report speaks of "the truth" and not of Jibrîl bringing the revelation; (b) that the passage of *sûrat al-Najm* speaks of a vision of God and (c) that the term *waḥy* as used in the Qur'ân does not mean verbal communication of a text. All these assumptions have already been examined and shown to be wrong and untenable[5]. Hence the above mentioned remarks of Watt are also untenable.

Watt admits that revelations by means of Jibrîl might have been common throughout the Madinan period. Why then the same angel could not have been the conveyer of *waḥy* in the earlier period is not explained by Watt. His

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[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 57.
[4] See *M.W.*, 1934, p. 149.
[5] See the previous chapter.

predecessor Bell of course suggests, as seen earlier, that Jibrîl was introduced at Madina because it was only then that the Prophet came to know about him (and the angels)! The unreasonableness of this explanation has been pointed out earlier. That Watt does not advance any explanation in this connection probably indicates that he is aware of the weakness of Bell's explanation but intends nonetheless to make use of the assumption.

While recognizing that during the Madinan period revelations by means of Jibrîl could be common Watt says that in such cases these were "presumably imaginative" locutions because the traditions mention Jibrîl appearing "in the form of a man" which suggests that his appearance was "an imaginative vision". Angels appearing in the form of human beings and delivering God's messages to His chosen persons is a familiar theme in the Old and the New Testament. Also, some Makkan passages of the Qur'ân, as noted earlier, say in reply to the Makkan unbelievers' objections that if an angel was to be sent as Allah's messenger to them he would still be sent in the form of a human being. The idea of an angel appearing in the form of a human being is thus neither novel in the case of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) nor is its information confined only to traditions of the Madinan period. Why then the appearance of an angel in the form of a human being should be only an "imaginative" affair is not explained by Watt. It may only be pointed out here that the coming of Jibrîl to the Prophet was not always an affair strictly private to him. Sometimes, as in the famous *ḥadâth* relating to *îmân* and *'iḥsân*, the appearance of Jibrîl in the form of a man was very much a physical affair noticed by the Prophet's companions. Therefore the matter cannot be simply disposed of by saying that the angel's appearance was "presumably" an "imaginative vision" on the Prophet's part..

It would have been observed that whatever the manner of *waḥy*, Watt has attempted to show it to be either an imaginative or an intellectual locution. Thus the first manner of *waḥy,* according to Watt, was an "interior", "probably an intellectual" locution; the second manner, "an imaginative locution (or even an exterior locution)", and the third manner, "presumably an imaginative" locution. The whole manoeuvre is directed towards showing that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* was a matter of the Prophet's mind, "intellect" and " consciousness", a psychological phenomenon, not verbal communication of any text made physically by any agency. By such manoeuvres Watt seems to aim also at bringing Islamic revelation in line with the Christian concept of "inspiration". Hence he asks his

readers not to confuse "visions" and "locutions" with hallucination, to take seriously the "science" and "discipline" of "mystical theology" as developed by writers like A. Poulain and suggests that "it would undoubtedly be profitable to make a full comparison of the phenomenal aspects of Muhammad's experiences with those of Christian saints and mystics."[1]

It should at once be pointed out that the analogy so far made by Watt between the "manners" of Qur'ânic *waḥy* and the mystical concepts of A. Poulain is neither convincing nor tenable. Nor are the manners of Qur'ânic revelation comparable with the experiences of the Christian saints and mystics who, being "inspired", are said to have put down in their own words what they understood from the "inspiration".

Finally, Watt refers to "the physical accompaniments of the reception of revelation" and to instances of the Prophet's putting on a *dithâr* and says that the symptoms described could not be identical with epilepsy which allegation Watt rejects as "completely unsound based on mere ignorance and prejudice." Having done so, however, he harps on the allegation of the Prophet's having known something of the method of "inducing" revelations "by 'listening' or self-hypnotism or whatever we like to call it."[2] It is further alleged that the Prophet knew the "way of emending the Qur'ân; ... of discovering the correct form of what had been revealed in incomplete or incorrect form."[3] Earlier, while speaking about what is called the Prophet's attempt to "induce emending revelations", Watt observes that "it is part of orthodox Muslim theory that some revelations were abrogated by others."[4]

Now, it is to be noted that Watt here combines two different theories of his predecessors into one theme. He reiterates, on the one hand, Margoliouth's theory of the inducing of revelations by a sort of self-hypnotism etc., and, on the other, relates it to Bell's theory of "revision" of the Qur'ân by the Prophet. It may be recalled that while Margoliouth bases his theory of "inducing" on what is called "the physical accompaniments of the reception of revelation", Bell bases his theory on the language-style of the Qur'ân and the theory of abrogation. So far as the latter's views are concerned, they are, as will be seen a little later on, untenable.[5] It may once again be pointed out that the concept of "abrogation"

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[1] WATT, *op.cit.*, 57.
[2] *Ibid.*, 57-58.
[3] *Ibid.*, 58.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] See *infra*, chapter IX, section II.

(*naskh*) relates not to the replacement of one *'âyah* of the Qur'ân by another *'ayah* or *'âyahs*, but to the amendment of certain *ḥukms* or instructions and rules of guidance. Watt combines the two themes by a subtle shift from the "physical accompaniments" to what is called "the technique" which the Prophet is alleged to have developed of "listening" and "discovering the missing verses", of "emending the Qur'ân", etc. The innuendo that apparently links the so-called "inducing" of revelations on the one hand and the "technique" of emending or revising the Qur'ân on the other is that in both cases it was a skill and technique acquired or artificially produced by the Prophet – a sort of "self-hypnotism or whatever we like to call it." It is difficult to see how this innuendo is any the better than the allegation of epilepsy which Watt so grandiloquently rejects. The main reason for his rejection of the theory of epilepsy appears to be not an intention to present the Prophet's image in a better form but a realization of the fact, as Watt points out, that "that disease leads to physical and mental degeneration, whereas Muhammad was in the fullest possession of his faculties to the very end."[1]

In making the alternative and no less serious reflection on the Prophet's character and integrity Watt does not cite a single instance of when the Prophet "induced" the "physical accompaniments" or applied the "technique" in "emending the Qur'ân" or in "discovering the missing verses". Watt simply disposes of this basic requirement in substantiating the allegation by saying that "the details must remain conjectural, but it would seem certain that Muhammad had some way of emending the Qur'ân..."[2] Thus does Watt present his conclusion avowedly on the basis of what is "conjectural" and what would "seem to be certain". Yet he starts his discussion by reminding others that in the matter of the Prophet's sincerity and integrity "conclusive proof is a much stricter requirement than a show of plausibility". Clearly, Watt has sacrificed his professed objective at the altar not even of plausibility but of conjecture savouring of prejudice.

Watt somewhat mollifies his conclusion by adding that the fact that "Muhammad sometimes induced his experiences of revelation" is not relevant "to the theologian's judgement of validity."[3] The statement is unnecessary because Watt professes not to express any theological opinion. But whether the question is relevant or not for the theologian's judgement, it is very much relevant to the

[1] WATT, *op.cit.*, 57.
[2] *Ibid.*, 58.
[3] *Ibid.*

historian's quest for the truth. By merely reproducing his predecessors' views that the Prophet sometimes "induced", that is, artificially produced the revelation or made emendation of the Qur'ân, by self-hypnotism or the like, the historian Watt has obviously slipped away from his stand as historian and has simply failed to act up to the standard he had set for himself at the beginning.

It appears that Watt here labours under a difficulty. Having concentrated his attention almost exclusively on the objective of casting the "experiences of revelation" into Poulain's mould of "imaginative" and "intellectual" locutions he at last finds himself confronted with the facts of physical hardships that undoubtedly sometimes accompanied the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet. Watt finds it impossible to fit them in the theory of intellectual or imaginative locutions. Hence he simply dumps them into the dustbin of the Margoliouth-Bell theories of inducing of revelations and emendation of the Qur'ân. He seems to have persuaded himself that since the theory of disease (epilepsy) does not work, that of deliberate fraud, namely, artificially producing and inducing the symptoms of revelations would. If Watt had considered the facts really objectively he would not have missed the point that "the physical accompaniments of the reception of revelation" strongly militate against the theory of intellectual or imaginative locution. After all, the Christian saints and mystics whom Poulain has chiefly in view do not appear to have had the physical accompaniments of revelation experienced by the Prophet. Hence his case is very much different from that of the saints and the mystics. Whatever the nature of their "interior prayer" and "inspiration", their situation cannot simply be transferred to the Prophet.

The instances of the physical accompaniments of the reception of revelation mentioned in the sources are indeed very few. If, therefore, *waḥy* was for most of the time what is called intellectual or imaginative locutions, as Watt says, it is not understandable why the Prophet should at all have had recourse to the method of "inducing", i.e., artificially producing the symptoms of revelations. The question of inducing the symptoms arises only if they are a constant feature or concomitant of the coming of *waḥy*. But that is not at all the case. Hence, neither were the symptoms ever induced by the Prophet nor was the coming of *waḥy* without those symptoms merely intellectual or imaginative locutions.

The expression "imaginative locution" or "intellectual locution" is in fact a contradiction in terms. "Locution" means "style of speech", "way of using words", "phrase or idiom". Poulain says that while "imaginative locution" is

received by the imaginative sense without the assistance of ear, "intellectual locution" is "a simple communication of thought without words, and consequently without any definite language". Now, thoughts and ideas, however abstract, could be conceived or communicated only by means of words and language, these being their only vehicle. Words are thus inseparable from thoughts and ideas. Any person, whatever his language, thinks and dreams in his own language, whether he expresses them vocally or not, or whether he uses the same set of words or the same language while expressing them. Any person who has no language can have no idea and no thought. Poulain's definition of "intellectual locution" as "simple communication of thought" without words and without language thus appears to be a high-sounding nonsense.

Whatever the sense Poulain and Watt assume for the expressions, the act of conceiving something, whether intellectually or imaginatively, presupposes the existence of its essence in the sub-conscious mind of the person concerned. He must have obtained its impression, idea or image somehow or other at some stage or other of his life. In the case of the Prophet, despite all the theories of his having allegedly learnt a good deal from Waraqah ibn Nawfal and other people in the markets of Makka and elsewhere, it cannot be proved that he had previously obtained the ideas and information about all that is mentioned or dealt with in the Qur'ân. If, on the other hand, this pre-requisite of the existence of sub-conscious knowledge or idea is dispensed with, it becomes necessary to import the role of the "supernatural" in the matter. Watt of course once says that the Prophet might have received communications "supernaturally".[1] In applying the theory of intellectual and imaginative locutions to the case of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, however, Watt does not at all mention the "supernatural", nor does he identify its relationship with the process of intellectual and imaginative locutions. In fact, if the role of the "supernatural" is faithfully and consistently acknowledged, there would be no need to utilize the "equipment" supplied by Poulain.

It should be clear from the above discussion that Watt has attempted to substantiate essentially the views of Bell regarding the Qur'ânic *waḥy* by adopting, on the one hand, the latter's interpretation of the term *waḥy* occurring in the Qur'ân and of the Qur'ânic passages 53:4-14 and 42:50-52 and, on the other, by twisting 'Â'ishah's (r.a) narration, which he calls Al-Zuhrî's report, of the coming of *waḥy* to the Prophet and by having recourse to the "equipment" of "intellectual

[1] *Ibid*, 47.

locution" supplied by A. Poulain. That Bell is grossly mistaken in his interpretations of the term *waḥy* and of the Qur'ânic passages he cites has already been shown by an analysis of some of the Qur'ânic passages wherein this specific term occurs in connection with the revelation of the Qur'ân. There are, however, a large number of Qur'ânic passages that speak very clearly about the nature of Qur'ânic revelation without employing the term *waḥy*. Since neither Bell nor Watt has taken into consideration these passages, it would be worthwhile to round off the present discussion by noticing some of them.

III. Further Qur'ânic evidences on the nature of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*

There are more than 125 passages in the Qur'ân which speak of its having been "sent down" (*tanzîl, 'anzalnâ, munazzal,* etc.) thereby stressing the fact that what was delivered was a specific text; for an abstract thought or idea or inspiration is not "sent down". In some of the passages, for instance 6:93, the expressions *'unzila* and *'anzala* are very much in apposition to the expressions *'ûḥiya* and *'awhâ.* Of the 125 or so times, it is mentioned at least 34 times that Allah "sent down" (*nazzala* and *'anzala*).[1] Again, Allah Himself speaks in the first person at least 33 times saying: "We have sent it down" (*'anjzaltu, 'anzalnâ, nazzalnâ*).[2] More than 40 times it is said in the passive voice that "it has been sent down" (*'unzila, 'unzilat, nuzzila, nuzzilat, yunazzalu, tunazzalu*).[3] And at least 14 times the Qur'ân is described as "something sent down" (*tanzîl, munazzal*). [4]Again, to remove all doubts about it, Allah Himself bears witness on this point in unequivocal terms as follows:

لكن الله يشهد بما أنزل اليك أنزله بعلمه والملائكة يشهدون و كفى بالله شهيدا

"But Allah bears witness that what He has sent down to you He has sent down with His knowledge (i.e., being fully aware of it); and the angels bear witness (to that); but Allah is enough for a witness." (4:166)

It is similarly emphasized at least a dozen times that what has been "sent down" is in a specific language, in Arabic. For instance:

انا أنزلناه قرآنا عربيا ...

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[1] The passages are: 2:29; 2:170; 2:231; 3:4; 3:7; 4:61; 4:113; 4:136; 4:166; 5:4; 5:45; 5:47; 5:48; 5:49 (two times); 5:104; 6:91; 6:93; 6:114; 9:97; 16:2; 16:24; 16:30; 16:110; 18:1; 25:6; 31:21; 36:15; 42:15; 42:17; 47:9; 57:9; 65:5 and 65:9.

[2] These passages are: 2:41; 2:99; 4:105; 4:174; 5:48; 6:92; 6:115; 10:94; 12:2; 13:37; 14:1; 16:44; 17:105; 17:106; 20:2; 20:113; 21:10; 21:50; 22:16; 24:1; 24:34; 24:46; 29:47; 29:51; 38:29; 39:2; 39:41; 44:3; 58:5; 59:21; 64:8; 76:23 and 97:1.

[3] These passages are: *'anzala* = 2:4; 2:91; 2:136; 2:185; 2:285; 3:72; 3:84; 3:199; 4:60; 4:162; 5:67; 5:70; 5:71; 5:84; 5:86; 6:156; 6:157; 7:2; 7:3; 7:157; 11:14; 13:1; 13:19; 13:36; 29:46; 34:6; 38:8; 39:55 and 46:30. *'unzilat* = 9:86; 9:124; 9:127; 28:87 and 47:20. *nuzzila* = 15:6; 16:44; 25:32; 43:31 and 47:2. *nuzzilat* = 47:20. *yunazzalu* = 2:105 and 5:104. *tunazzalu* = 9:64.

[4] These passages are : 6:114; 17:106; 20:4; 26:192; 32:2; 36:5; 39:1; 40:2; 41:42; 45:2; 46:2; 56:80; 69:43 and 76:23.

"Surely We have sent it down, an Arabic Qur'ân...." (12:2)

و انه لتنزيل رب العالمين ... بلسان عربى مبين

"And certainly it is a sent-down of the Lord of all beings ... in the clear Arabic tongue." (26:192...195).[1]

Moreover, that which has been sent down is collectively as well as severally described as the *Book* (*Kitâb*) in more than a score of passages.[2] Some of these passages are as follows:

تنزيل الكتاب لا ريب فيه من رب العالمين

"The sending down of the Book, there is no doubt in it, is from the Lord of all the worlds." (32:2)

تنزيل الكتاب من الله العزيز الحكيم. انا أنزلنا اليك الكتاب بالحق ...

"The sending down of the Book is from Allah, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise. Verily it is We Who have sent down the Book to you in truth..." (39:1-2).

الله نزل أحسن الحديث كتابا ...

"Allah sent down the best speech/text as a Book." (39:23)

It is to be noted that in the above quoted passage, what has been sent down is also described as "speech" or "text" (*ḥadîth*). The same description of the Qur'ânic *waḥy* occurs in other passages as well. For instance:

فذروني و من يكذب بهذا الحديث ...

"So leave Me and the one who regards as false this text (*ḥadîth*)...." (68:44)

فليأتوا بحديث مثله ان كانوا صادقين ...

"So let them then come up with a text (*ḥadîth*) like it, if they are truthful." (52:34)[3]

Equally significant is that, what is sent down is described as Allah's "Decree" (*ḥukm*), His "Command/Order" (*'amr*). For instance:

و كذلك أنزلناه حكما عربيا ...

"And thus We have sent it down as a decree/rescript in Arabic." (13:37)

ذلك أمر الله أنزله اليكم...

"That is the Command of Allah; He has sent it down to you..." (65:5)

Again, what is "sent down" is specifically called a *sûrah* (chapter). For instance:

سورة أنزلناها و فرضناها و أنزلنا فيها ءايات بينات

"A *sûrah*, We have sent it down and have made it incumbent; and We have sent down in it clear signs..." (24:1)

يحذر المنافقون أن تنزل عليهم سورة ...

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[1] See also Q. 13:37; 16:103; 19:97; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3; 44:58 and 46:12.

[2] See for instance: 2:176; 2:231; 3:3; 3:7; 4:105; 4:113; 4:136; 4:140; 5:48; 6:7; 6:92; 6:114; 6:155; 7:2; 7:196; 14:1; 15:6; 15:9; 16:44; 16:64; 16:89; 17:106; 18:1; 20:2; 21:10; 29:47; 29:51; 38:29; 39:2; 39:41; 42:15; 42:17; 45:2; 46:2; 46:30.

[3] See also Q. 7:185; 18:6; 45:6; 53:59; 56:81 and 77:50.

"The hypocrites fear lest a *surah* should be sent down against them" (9:64) [1]

Further, that which is "sent down" is termed *dhikr* (citation, account, narrative, reminder, reminiscence, etc.). For instance:

انا نحن نزلنا الذكر و انا له لحافظون

"Verily it is We Who have sent down the *dhikr*, and it is We Who shall certainly preserve it." (15:9)

و قالوا يا أيها الذي نزل عليه الذكر انك لمجنون

"And they say: O the one on whom the *dhikr* has been sent down, you are indeed mad." (15:6)

... و أنزلنا اليك الذكر لتبين للناس ما نزل اليهم ...

"And We have sent down to you the *dhikr*, in order that you explain to men what has been sent down to them." (16:44) [2]

Besides the expression "sending down" there are other terms as well used in the Qur'ân to denote Qur'ânic *waḥy*. An important term in this series is *'ilqâ'*, meaning delivering, throwing, flinging, dictating, which is used in a very early passage, namely, 73:5 which runs as: *'innâ sa-nulqî 'alayka qawlan thaqîlâ* (Verily We will soon throw on (deliver to) you a weighty word). Another very early passage wherein the term occurs is 54:25 which states: *'a-'ulqiya al-dhikr 'alayhi min bayninâ...* (Has the *dhikr* been thrown on him, of all of us?"

Of similar import is the expression *wassalna*, meaning: "We have caused to reach", used in connection with the delivery of Qur'ânic *waḥy*. Thus 28:51 states: *wa laqad waṣṣalnâ lahum al-qawla la'allahum yatadhakkarûn* (And We have caused the word (saying) to reach them so that they may receive admonition."

Similarly there are a number of passages wherein the expressions *qasasna* (We narrated)/related) and *naquṣṣu* (We narrate/relate) bear the same sense of *'awḥaynâ* (We communicated) and *nûḥî* (We communicate). For instance : *Tilka al-qurâ naquṣṣu 'alayka min 'anbâ'iha* (Those are the towns/settlements of which the accounts We relate to you... 7:101). *wa kullan naqussu 'alayka min 'anbâ' al-rusul...* (And all that We narrate to you of the accounts of the messengers... 11:120). *Naḥnu naquṣṣu 'alayka naba'ahum bi al-ḥaqq* (We narrate to you their accounts in truth... 18:13).[3] It is noteworthy that in these passages what is narrated/related is termed "accounts/reports" (*naba', 'anbâ'*).

Of greater significance are the group of expressions that say "We have it read" (*nuqri'u*), "We have read" (*qara'nâ*) and "We recite" (*natlû*) in lieu of *nûḥi* and

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[1] See also Q. 9:86; 9:127 and 47:20.

[2] See also Q. 7:63; 7:69; 12:104; 21:2; 21:50; 26:5; 36:11; 36:69; 38:1; 38:8; 38:49; 38:87; 41:41; 43:5; 43:44; 54:25; 68:51; 68:52 and 81:27.

[3] See also Q. 4:164; 6:57; 11:100; 12:3; 16:118; 18:13; 20:99 and 40:78.

'awhaynâ. For instance 87:6 states: *sa-nuqri'uka fa-lâ tansâ* (We shall have (it) read unto you; so you shall not forget). Similarly 75:18 states: *fa-'idhâ qara'nâhu fattabi' qur'ânahu* (So when We have it read/recited, then repeat its reading/recitation). Again, 45:6 states: *Tilka 'âyât Allah natlûhâ 'alayka bi al-ḥaqq* (Those are the signs of Allah; We recite that unto you in truth.)[1]

It should also be noted that in 28:51, 54:25 and 73:5 quoted above, what is delivered to (*nulqî 'ala*) or made to reach (*waṣṣalnâ*) the Prophet is called *qawl,* i.e., saying or word of Allah.[2] This term has the same signification as those of *ḥadith* (statement, saying, text) and *kalimât* (words) mentioned earlier. Besides, the expression *qul* occurs at least 332 times in the Qur'ân, thus emphasizing that the Messenger of Allah was given the dictation by Allah.

To sum up, there are at least half a dozen different terms used in the Qur'ân in lieu of *waḥy* to denote the delivery of Qur'ânic *waḥy* to the Prophet. These terms, to recapitulate, are :

(a) *'Anzalna:* "We sent down", in various forms of the root word, and repeated statements that the Qur'ân is something "sent down" (*tanzîl, munazzal*).

(b) *Waṣṣalnâ* : "We caused to reach".

(c) *Nuqri'u/Qara'nâ* : "We have (it) read".

(d) *Natlû* : "We recite".

(e) *Nulqi* : "We throw/deliver".

(f) *Naquṣṣu* : "We relate/narrate".

All these terms clearly show that what was delivered to the Prophet was in the form of specific texts. But the evidence is not confined to the import of these expressions alone. The passages containing them and also those containing the term *waḥy* jointly and severally state unequivocally that what was thus delivered to the Prophet was:

(a) A Qur'ân (Reading/Recitation);

(b) A *Kitâb* (Book/Scripture);

(c) A *sûrah* (chapter);

(d) *Ḥadith* (statement/saying) of Allah;

(e) *Qawl* (saying/word) of Allah;

(f) *Kalimât* (words) of Allah;

(g) *Hukm* (a decree/order) of Allah;

(h) *'Amr* (command) of Allah;

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[1] See also Q. 2:252; 3:28; 3:108.

[2] See also Q. 18:39; 23:68; 69:40; 81:19 and 86:13.

(i) *'Anbâ'* (accounts/narratives) given by Allah.

There are of course other terms and expressions in the Qur'ân that refer to the Qur'ânic *waḥy*. It should be clear from the above, however, that the divergence between the Qur'ânic evidence on the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy* and the orientalists' assumptions about it is irreconcilable. Thus, for instance,: (a) The Qur'ân says (and authentic reports repeat the same facts) that Allah sent an angel-messenger (Jibrîl) with the Qur'ânic *waḥy* to the Prophet. The orientalist, on the other hand, would have us believe that the coming of the angel to the Prophet was "probably" and "intellectual" or even an "imaginary" vision on his part! (b) The Qur'ân says that in the initial stage of the receipt of Qur'ânic *waḥy* the Prophet used hastily to move his tongue to repeat it; but he was asked not to do so and was assured that Allah would enable him to remember and recite the text. As against this, the orientalists would say that the Prophet's experience was "probably" an "exterior" or even an "intellectual" locution! (c) The Qur'ân says that it was Allah's "words" (*kalimât*), His "saying" (*qawl/ḥadîth*), a Book (*Kitâb*), etc., that were delivered to the Prophet and that also in the "clear Arabic tongue". The orientalists would insist that the Prophet had only an "intellectual locution", "without words" and even "without any specific language"! Clearly, such assumptions do not have any support in the Qur'ân, whatever the "equipment" with which these might have been framed.

Besides the passages containing the term *waḥy* and its equivalents, and the other expressions on the point mentioned before, there are a number of further facts mentioned in the Qur'ân that bear clearly on the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy* and show that it did in no way emanate from the Prophet himself, neither "intellectually", nor "imaginatively", nor lingually. Some of these facts are as follows:

(1) The Qur'ân itself, and therefore the Prophet also, strongly and repeatedly deny the allegation made by the unbelievers that it was his own composition. It is further stated that none could be a worse sinner than the one who himself composed a text and then falsely attributed it to Allah and that if the Prophet did so he could not have averted severe punishment for that offence.[1]

(2) Closely connected with this repeated denial of the allegation is the challenge which the Qur'ân (and therefore the Prophet) throws to the detractors of all time to come up with a text like that of the Qur'ân. It must be noted that

[1] Q. 3:94; 6:21; 6:93; 6:144; 7:37; 10:17; 10:37-38; 10:69; 11:13; 11:18; 11:35; 16:116; 18:15; 21:15; 25:4; 29:68; 32:3: 42:24; 46:8; 61:7 and 69:44-47. Se also *supra*, p.

this challenge is not an item of the so-called subsequently developed Islamic orthodoxy but very much in the Qur'ân itself.[1] This challenge still remains open; but the very fact that it was made at the time means that the Qur'ân and the Prophet denied the allegation of his having himself composed it.

(3) The Qur'ân also shows that the unbelievers of the time indirectly admitted that it was not really the Prophet's own composition; for when they realized that he was incapable of composing it himself they came up with the alternative allegation that others had composed it for him. That allegation too was quickly rebutted.[2]

(4) Another indirect admission on their part was that though they asked the Prophet to produce some specified miracles they could not conceal their surprise at the extraordinary nature of the Qur'ânic text. Thus, whenever a *sûrah* or a Qur'ânic passage was given out to them they came out with the remark that it was "a clear sorcery" (*siḥr mubîn*), "a magic".[3] They even called him a "magician/sorcerer" obviously on account of his giving out the Qur'ân; for he had not performed any other magic as such. This shows that they did not at all consider the Qur'ânic texts to be like the ordinary speeches of the Prophet, nor did they think them to be in any way comparable to the literary compositions they were habituated to hearing.

(5) It is also noteworthy that the unbelievers repeatedly asked the Prophet to give them a different Qur'ân or to change it. In reply he told them very clearly that it was not within his power to change even a word of what was *waḥy*-ied to him and that he was himself to follow it to the word. With reference to this demand of the unbelievers the Qur'ân states:

و اذا تتلى عليهم ءاياتنا بينات قال الذين لا يرجون لقاءنا ائت بقرءان غير هذا أو بدله قل ما يكون لي أن أبدله من
تلقاء نفسي ان اتبع الا ما يوحى الي ...

"And when Our clear *'âyâhs* (signs, the Qur'ânic texts) are recited unto them, those who do not hope to meet Us say: 'Bring us a Qur'ân (reading/recitation) other than this, or change it.' Say: 'It is not for me that I can change it from myself (on my own accord). I follow naught but what is *wḥay*-ied to me." (10:15)

The last sentence of the above passage is also very significant. Not only that the Prophet did not compose the Qur'ân nor was free to change a word of it, he himself was subject to its dictates and injunctions.[4]

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[1] Q. 2:23; 11:13; 52:34.
[2] Q. 16:103.
[3] See for instance Q. 5:110; 6:7; 6:16; 10:76; 11:7; 21:3; 27:13; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 52:2 and 74:24.
[4] See also Q. 6:106; 7:103 and 46:9.

(6) Again, the pre-prophetic life of the Messenger of Allah is cited in bringing home the fact that the Qur'ân was none of his compositions. Thus the *'âyah* that immediately follows the one quoted above states:

قل لو شاء الله ما تلوته عليكم ولا أدراكم به فقد لبثت فيكم عمرا من قبله أفلا تعقلون

"Say: 'If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it unto you; nor would He have made it known to you. A whole life-time before this have I spent among you. Do you not then understand?" (10:16)

This *'âyah* actually calls attention to three important facts. First, it refers to his previous character and conduct in general, specially his acknowledged truthfulness and integrity, thus stressing the fact that he was not the sort of a person who would, all of a sudden, appear before his community with a false claim about himself and also about the teachings he was giving out to them. Second, it draws attention to the fact that for at least forty years of his life prior to his call he had never shown any desire to be a leader of his people nor had expressed any intention to carry out a socio-religious reform of his society. Third, and most important of all, he had never exhibited any literary skill or ambition and had never before the coming of *waḥy* to him composed a single sentence of literary Arabic. This fact is decisive; for it is common knowledge that a person who has no literary experience or training cannot all of a sudden produce first class, or rather incomparable literary compositions even if he is supplied with the ideas and facts from another source.

(7) The Qur'ân also contains a number of statements about scientific facts of which the meaning and significance are becoming clear with the progress of scientific knowledge in recent times.[1] This shows that the Prophet or any one of his alleged assistants could not have composed the texts.

Thus the Qur'ân strongly and in various ways contradicts the assumption that it was the Prophet's own composition based on "suggestions" or "inspiration" received from another source or an "intellectual locution" without any words or definite language. In fact the modern orientalist's approach to the subject seems to suffer from an inherent contradiction. He seems to profess belief in God and His sending of angels with His words and messages to the Old and New Testament Prophets and other chosen individuals; but in dealing with Muḥammad (p.b.h.) and the Qur'ân he slips away from that position and takes a secularist stance in that he in effect argues that since the phenomena of an angel's coming with God's words to a Prophet or God's communicating His words to

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[1] *Supra*, pp. 71-88.

him in other ways do not appear to be in accord with ordinary human understanding and experience, the Qur'ân's and Muḥammad's (p.b.h.) statements to such effects should be interpreted with the help of "mystic", "psychological" and "philosophical" equipment. Even then, the modern orientalist appears to be aware that what he adduces as the proofs of the Qur'ân and the traditions about the nature of Qur'ânic *waḥy* is mostly forced, unnatural and "tendential shaping" of the texts and facts and that there still remains much in both the sources that contradicts his assumptions. Hence, to make up the deficiency, he has had recourse to the advertisements of the Prophet's sincerity in order to deny the truth of what he says. The Prophet was sincere, it is said, and he conscientiously believed in what he said, but he was nonetheless mistaken in what he believed and said. He said that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* was a verbal communications of the texts in Arabic. The orientalist says: "No, the Prophet only sincerely believed and thought it to be so; but actually he received some ideas and thoughts – it was only a matter of his mind and intellect, an aspect of his special consciousness, an imaginative or intellectual locution. He even at times "induced" the receipt of such suggestions and ideas. The statements of the Qur'ân and of Muḥammad (p.b.h.) on the one hand, and those of the modern orientalist, on the other, are thus poles apart. It is difficult to see how these views are in any way different from what the Quryash unbelievers of Makka used to say before their acceptance of Islam that the Qur'ânic *waḥy* was the Prophet's "medleys of dreams" (*'adghâth 'aḥlâm*),[1] or what William Muir said that it was the Prophet's "trance utterance" or what Margoliouth said that it was the natural conclusion which comes into one's mind after prolonged deliberation and consideration over a certain matter. In their views regarding the Qur'ân and the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, thus, the modern orientalists stand in effect on the same plane where the Makkan unbelievers stood some fourteen hundred years ago and where William Muir and his contemporaries stood a century and a half ago.

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[1] Q. 21:15.

Part III
The Orientalists On the History and Text of the Qur'ân

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'ÂN: I. THEODORE NÖLDEKE'S ASSUMPTIONS

I. THE BASIC FACTS[1]

The sources make it clear that Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, received from Allah and gave out the Qur'ân in instalments throughout his mission for a period of twenty-three years between 610 and 632 C.E. Sometimes he received and gave out a complete *sûrah*, sometimes only a part of it consisting of a few *'âyahs*. Indeed, the very first instalment which he received and gave out was *'âyahs* 1-5 of *sûrah* 96 (*al-'alaq*). The *sûrahs* and passages of *sûrahs* were communicated to him by Allah through the angel *Jibrîl* on suitable occasions and circumstances of his mission giving the most appropriate guidance and directives. As he received each piece of the Qur'ân he gave it out *immediately* to his people. The report of Khâlid al-'Udwânî noted before[2] saying that he memorised *sûrat al-Ṭâriq* (86) while he was still an unbeliever by simply hearing the Prophet recite it is very significant in this regard. Any impartial reader of the Qur'ân, whether he believes it to be divine in origin or not, cannot fail to be struck by the absolute contemporaneity of its text with the mission and activities of the Prophet and the development of the Muslim community under his leadership. The Qur'ân itself contains indisputable evidence of its gradual but immediate promulgation in parts as they were received. "A Qur'ân We have sectionalized it that you may recite it to the people at intervals; and We have sent it down in gradual sending down",[3] so runs *'âyah* 106 of *sûrah* 17. "And there say those who disbelieve: 'Why is not there sent down on him the Qur'ân as a whole?' This is so that We may make firm thereby your heart; and We have recited it in a regular order", says *'âyah* 32 of *sûrah* 25.[4] Yet another *'âyah,* 10:15, states: "And when recited to them are Our sings open and clear, there say those who do not look forward to meeting Us: 'Bring us a Qur'ân other than this or alter it.' Say: 'It is not for me that I can alter it of my own accord. I follow naught but what is communicated to me."[5] There are many *'âyahs* and *sûrahs* in the Qur'ân

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[1] See for a detailed account , M. M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'ânic Text from Revelation to Compilation*, Leicester, 2003.

[2] *Sûpra*, p. 178.

[3] The text runs as follows: و قرءانا فرقناه لتقرأه على الناس على مكث و نزلناه تنزيلا

[4] The text runs as follows: و قال الذين كفروا لو لا نزل عليه القرءان حملة واحدة كذلك لنثبت به فؤادك و رتلناه ترتيلا

[5] The text runs as: و اذا تتلى عليهم ءاياتنا بينات قال الذين لا يرجون لقاءنا ائت بقرءان غير هذا او بدله قل ما يكون لى أن أبدله منتلقاى نفسى ان أتبع الا ما يوحى الى

demonstrating the immediate promulgation of a *sûrah* or a passage as it was received by the Prophet.[1] Indeed the contemporaneity of the text of the Qur'ân with the life and activities of the Prophet is so glaring that an unbelieving reader is apt to be misled into an impression that Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, himself composed and gave out the passages or *sûrahs* as the situation and circumstances arose.

The receipt and giving out of the *sûrahs* or parts of the *sûrahs* were not consecutive. This means that neither are the *sûrahs* as they appear in the complete Qur'ân were given out in the same order, nor were the different passages of the same *sûrahs,* which contain separately promulgated passages, given out one after another. Rather, different passages of different *sûrahs* were given out on different occasions so that a passage given out earlier is sometimes joined with passages given out later and are thus included in one *sûrah,* and vice versa. There are a few *sûrahs* which are generally categorised as Makkan contain passages given out at Madina. The order of the passages in each *sûrah*, even if given out at different times, as well as the order of the *sûrahs* in the complete Qur'ân, be they Makkan or Madinan, were both settled by the Prophet under divine directives and in accordance with an arche-type preserved with Allah. These facts are attested, besides a number of authentic reports, by the Qur'ân itself. "Verily it is a noble Qur'ân, in a Book well-guarded", so declare its *'âyahs* 56:77-78.[2] "Nay, this is a Qur'ân most sublime, in a tablet well-preserved", declare *'âyahs* 85:21-22.[3] The "tablet well-preserved" mentioned here may be well understood in terms of the modern concept of a "hard disc". Again, the Prophet is assured by Allah about his remembering the texts as well as their gathering and arrangement as follows: "Move not with it your tongue to hasten with it. Verily upon Us is its collection and recitation. So when We recite it follow its recitation."[4] The Prophet is here asked not to move hurriedly his tongue to repeat and remember the texts as they were being delivered to him and is assured that he will be enabled to remember them and To collect and arrange them in their proper order.

The last mentioned passage informs us that the Prophet tried and was enabled to remember each *sûrah* or passage as it was communicated to him. This is

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[1] See for instance, 6:7; 8:31; 10:16; 19:73; 22:72; 29:51; 31:7; 33:34; 34:43; 45:7; 45:25; 46:7; 68:15; 73:13; and *sûrahs* 58; 63; 80; 111.

[2] The text runs as follows: انه لقرءان كريم في كتاب مكنون

[3] The text runs as follows: بل هو قرءان مجيد في لوح محفوظ

[4] 75:16-18. The text runs as follows: لا تحرك به لسانك لتعجل به ان علينا جمعه و قرءانه فاذا قرأناه فاتبع قرءانه

reiterated in another *'âyah* as follows: "We shall make you recite; so you shall not forget."[1] In fact he committed to memory each and every *sûrah* and passage of the Qur'ân as they were communicated to him. So did many of his companions. The necessity for doing so was that the daily prayers which the believers were from the beginning commanded to perform consisted mainly of recitation of some Qur'ânic *sûrahs* or passages together with bowing and prostration. An early Qur'ânic passage commands the Prophet to spend more or less a half of the night standing in prayer and reciting the Qur'ân in regular order.[2] And the last *'âyah* of the same *sûrah* confirms that he indeed used to spend two-thirds or so of the night standing in prayer and reciting the Qur'ân; and so did a group of his companions.[3] The Prophet himself taught many of his early followers the Qur'ân. In fact his preaching consisted mainly of the giving out of the texts of the Qur'ân as they were received and reciting and teaching them. Whenever a preacher was sent to any place for preaching Islam he was invariably a Qur'ân-teacher (*muqri'*) who had memorized the Qur'ân. Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, who was sent to Madina prior to the migration to preach Islam among its people was such a Qur'ân-teacher. The seventy of the Prophet's companions who were sent on a mission to Bi'r Ma'ûnah and were there treacherously killed by the inimical tribes were all Qur'ân-teachers (*qurrâ'*).[4] In the course of time the Prophet as well as many of his followers had the entire Qur'ân committed to memory.[5] At intervals, particularly in the month of Ramadân, the Prophet used to recite the whole Qur'ân, as far as it was received, to the angel Jibrîl; and during the last Ramadân of his life he recited the entire Qur'ân twice before that angel.[6]

Simultaneously with this process of memorization the Prophet also had the *sûrahs* and passages of the Qur'ân, as they were communicated to him, written down on suitable objects like tree-leaves, bones, hides, barks, stones and the like. A number of his literate companions acted as his scribes in this respect.[7] Indeed the impetus to have the texts written down was given in the very first passage communicated him. It emphasizes, among other things, the acquisition and preservation of knowledge by means of the pen.[8] In another early passage Allah

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[1] 87:6 . The text runs as follows: سنقرئك فلا تنسى

[2] 73:1-4. The text runs as follows: يأيهاالمزمل قم الليل الا قليلا نصفه أو انقص منه قليلا أو زد عليه و رتل القرءان ترتيلا

[3] 73:20. The text runs as follows: ان ربك يعلم أنك تقوم أدنى من ثلثى الليل و نصفه و ثلثه و طائفة من الذين معك ....

[4] *Bukhârî*, nos. 4088-4090

[5] See Al-Dhahabî, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffâẓ*, ed. *'Abd al-Raḥmân ibn Yaḥyâ al-Ma'lamî*, 3 vols., Makka, 1374 H.

[6] *Bukhârî*, nos. 1902, 4997, 4998.

[7] See M. M. 'A'ẓamî, *Kuttâb al-Nabî Sallahhahu 'Alayhi wa sallama*, (Arabic text), Beirut, 1394.

swears "by the pen and what they write" (و القلم و ما يسطرون).[2] Also, the Qur'ân is called at least seventy times in it as the *Kitâb* (Book, Scripture, Writing) and at one place Allah swears by it as: " And by a Book, written down" (و كتاب مسطور).[3] Written records of the Qur'ânic texts were kept with the Prophet as well as with many of his followers. The story of Fâtimah bint al-Khaṭṭâb's having concealed a written sheet of the Qur'ânic text at the approach of her enraged brother, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb's (r.a.) to her house and then of her having shown it to him when he calmed down and his ultimate conversion to Islam on a perusal of it is well-known to any student of Islamic history. After the migration to Madina four of the *'anṣâr* were particularly employed for writing down the Qur'ânic texts.[4] One report has it that the Prophet once warned his companions not to write down all his statements and utterances lest they should be mixed up with the texts of the Qur'ân.[5]

The communication of the Qur'ân was completed and the last instalment of it was received by the Prophet only a few days before his death. When he died written records of the Qur'ân texts were in his house as well as with many of his Companions. Besides, his scribes like Zayd ibn Thâbit and many other Companions had memorized the whole Qur'ân. Almost immediately after the Prophet's death a number of Arab tribes made an attempt to secede from the authority of Madina. In the wars that followed, the *riddah* wars, many *ḥuffâẓ* (retainers of the entire Qur'ân in memory) died. Hence, at 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb's suggestion the first *khalîfah* Abû Bakr took steps to have the written records of the Qur'ânic texts arranged in the order of the *sûrahs* and sections as taught by the Prophet and as learnt by the *ḥuffâẓ*. The task was entrusted to Zayd ibn Thâbit and a public announcement was made for anyone having anything of the Qur'ân with him to come up with it and deliver it to either 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb and Zayd ibn Thâbit. The latter, though he was himself a *ḥâfiẓ* (retainer of the entire Qur'ân in memory), was instructed not to accept anything merely because it was written down but to compare it with the recitation of a *ḥâfiẓ* .[6] Zayd himself states: "So I collected the Qur'ân from palm leaves, thin stones and bones [i. e., on which the texts were written] and the hearts of men [i. e., comparing with the

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1 96:4-5.
2 67:1.
3 52:2.
4 *Bukhârî*, nos. 3810, 3996, 5003, 5004; *Muslim*, no. 2465; *Musnad*, III, 233, 277; *Tayâlisî*, no. 2018.
5 *Muslim*, no. 3004.
6 Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân*, I, p. 166.

recitation of the *ḥuffâẓ*]; and I found the last *'âyah* of *sûrat al-tawbah* with 'Abû Khuzaymah al-Ansâri. I did not find it with anyone else."[1] This last statement is very significant. Zayd knew the *'âyah* in question and retained it in memory; but he did not include it in the collection until he found a written record of it with 'Abû Khuzaymah al-'Anṣârî. Even with regard to the written records nothing was accepted unless it was attested by independent witnesses that it was written in the presence of the Prophet.[2] Thus a master-copy of the Qur'ân was made and it was kept with 'Abû Bakr during his life-time, then with 'Umar and, after his death, with his daughter *'Umm al-Mu'minîn* Ḥafṣah.[3]

During the *khilâfah* of 'Uthmân (24-35 H.) a tendency towards variant readings of the Qur'ân was detected in the far-flung provinces. Hence he took immediate steps to make copies of the Qur'ân from the master-copy in Ḥafṣah's keeping and to send them to the various provinces. He appointed a commission for this task headed by the same Zayd ibn Thâbit who was at that time the chief-justice of Madina. The other members of the commission were 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, Sa'îd ibn al-'Âṣ and 'Abd al-Raḥmân ibn al-Ḥârith ibn Hishâm. They were instructed to address themselves mainly to the variations that had crept up in the recitation, i. e., vocalization and pronunciation, and were asked, in case of noticing any difference with regard to any *'âyah* or expression, to find out any person whom the Prophet had himself taught to recite the *'âyah* or expression in question and to ascertain the correct mode of recitation. If no such person was found with regard to any *'âyah* or expression and there existed a difference in its mode of reading they were directed to adopt the reading or dialect of Quraysh, for the Qur'ân was sent down in their dialect. The Commission meticulously followed the procedure and made several copies of the Qur'ân which were sent to the different provinces with instructions to withdraw and suppress any variation in the reading found to exist anywhere.[4]

Since then the same Qur'ân has been in circulation in writing as it has been also preserved and transmitted from generation to generation through memorization of its entire text. The practice of memorization continues still today in spite of the tremendous progress in the art of printing and in photo-mechanical and electronic reproduction and retrieval systems. Indeed the act of memorizing the Qur'ân and of learning it and teaching it has been assigned

[1] *Bukhârî*, n.o. 4986.
[2] Al-Suyûṭî, *op. cit.*
[3] *Bukhârî*, nos. 4986, 4989, 7191.
[4] Al-Sayûṭî, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-171.

great religious merit by the Prophet so that even today Muslims can count among their ranks millions of *ḥuffâẓ* of the entire Qur'ân, whereas it is hard to find among the votaries of other religious systems a single individual who can recite from memory even a whole chapter from his sacred text. Also, since the Prophet's time it has been the continual practice of Muslims for all climes to complete the recitation of the whole Qur'ân through the month-long special nightly *tarâwîh* prayer during the month of Ramaḍân. No other people on earth have shown so much avidity and taken so meticulous a care to preserve the purity of their sacred Book as the Muslims have done.

It should be noted, however, that at the time of 'Uthmân (r.a.) the Arabic script was not yet fully developed. The letters that have now-a-days dots above or below them were without dots (*nuqaṭ*), there were no vowel signs (*tashkîl/ ḥarakat*) and *hamzahs* were not written. These did not however cause any problem for the Arabs; for they could recognize the specific letters from the context. So could the *ḥarakât* be dispensed with for a person who knew the language. (Even in modern times Arabic books and news papers are printed without *ḥarakât* .)The difficulties that might be faced by non-Arabs in reading and reciting the Qur'ân because of the absence of these were however removed before long. Thus, during the *khilâfah* of 'Alî ibn 'Abî Ṭâlib (r.a.) and under his instruction the famous Arabic grammarian 'Abû al-Aswad al-Du'alî (d. 69 H.) completed the task of putting *ḥarakât* on the Qur'ânic text; while his two students, Naṣr ibn 'Âṣim (d. 89) and Yaḥyâ ibn Ya'mar (d. 100) completed the task of putting dots (*nuqaṭ*) on the letters during the *khilâfah* of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwân (d. 86 H.). 'Abû 'Amr Muḥammad ibn Sa'îd al-Dânî, a fifth century scholar of Qur'ânic studies, states that he saw an old copy of the Qur'ân "written during the beginning of the Caliphate of Hishâm ibn 'Abd al-Malik .... by Mughîrah ibn Mînâ, in Rajab, in the year 110 A.H. It had *tashkîl*, the *hamzahs* and the dots..."[1]

II. Nöldeke's Assumptions

Within the framework of the above mentioned facts the orientalists fit in their assumptions and theories, sometimes twisting and misinterpreting them, sometimes ignoring or casting doubts on them, but mostly making unwarranted surmises and assumptions. The process in its modern phase started early in the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact the main lines of the orientalists'

[1] Quoted in Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ân*, Birmingham, 1999, p. 144.

approach were indicated by Muir and Sprenger whose works were published in the fifties and early sixties of the century. But the first systematic work on the subject was the *Geschichte des Qorans* (History of the Qur'ân) of Theodore Nöldeke which was published for the first time in 1860.[1] Drawing on the Islamic sources, mainly on al-Ṭabarî's commentaries[2] and al-Suyûṭî's *Itqân*[3], Nöldeke concentrated on the internal or textual history of the Qur'ân. Taking his cue from the basic facts of the gradual coming down of the Qur'ânic texts, the composition of the *sûrahs* by a combination of the passages received at different times and their "occasions" as narrated in the Muslim sources Nöldeke attempted to identify the dates of the Qur'ânic passages as well as of the *sûrahs*. In the process he discussed what he conceived to be the Judaeo-Christian origins of the Qur'ân, the nature of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*, the nature and character of the Prophet and the literary merit of the Qur'ân, reflecting and reiterating the usual orientalist views on these, mainly those of George Sale, William Muir and Aloys Spremger. He also dealt with the "collection" and publication of the entire Qur'ân during the times of Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân (r.a.).

In tracing the dates of the Qur'ânic passages (apart from the *sûrahs*) Nöldeke does not in most cases follow the *occasions* of revelations given in the Muslim sources but proceeds on two main assumptions, namely, (a) that many of the long *sûrahs* are the result of an amalgamation of various originally distinct revelations and, (b) the supposed differences in literary style, "abrupt" changes in the subject matter and interruption in the connection of thought. On the basis of these two assumptions he severs out many pieces of long *sûrahs* as originally independent, assigning them supposed dates. His object in doing so is to show that the Qur'ân is, as he sees it, a patchwork of incoherent themes and episodes.

He follows more or less the same logic in tracing the chronological order of the *sûrahs*. Thus, he divides the *sûrahs* into four periods, the early Makkan, the mid-Makkan, the late Makkan and the Madinan, fixing the chronological order of each group according to the length, theme, literary style and what he conceives to be the "convulsive excitement" of the early group, the gradual diminishing of the glow and fervour of the middle and late Makkan groups and the "prosaic" tone of the Madinan group of *sûrahs*, using as far as it suits his purpose the known

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[1] Subsequently edited and enlarged by Schwally, Pretzl and Bergstrasser and published in three volumes between 1909 and 1938.

[2] Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*.

[3] Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*.

"occasions" of revelations. Needless to say that his chronological order of the *sûrahs* differs considerably from that given by the Muslim sources.

As regards the collection and publication of the Qur'ân under 'Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân (r. a.) Nöldeke's main assumptions are that Zayd ibn Thâbit collected the texts, "edited/redacted" them, combined the many originally independent passages into *sûrahs* and arranged them in the present order; and that nonetheless the Qur'ân is not complete.

Subsequently to the publication of his *Geschichte* Nöldeke modified some of his extreme and obviously untenable views. A good summary of his later views is his article on the Qur'ân which he wrote for the 1891 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.*[1] His first notable modification is with regard to the severing of passages from long *sûrahs* and assigning them separate dates. He now recognized that although many long and even short *sûrahs* contain passages revealed at different dates, the "sifting operation" should not be carried too far, "as", he admits, " I now believe myself to have done in my earlier works, and as Sprenger in his great book on Muhammad also sometimes seems to do." [2] He further recognizes that some *sûrahs* of considerable length, such as XII, XVIII and XX, are "perfectly homogeneous" and that even in the case of a *sûrah* containing separate narrations we are to note "how readily the Koran passes from one subject to another" and that therefore we are not at liberty "in every case where the connection in the Koran is obscure, to say that it is really broken, and set it down as the clumsy patchwork of a later hand... In short, ... in the majority of cases the present suras are identical with the originals."[3] It must at once be added that had Nöldeke been able to emancipate himself completely from the usual orientalist's bias he could have seen that the Qur'ân is not at all a heterogeneous collection and that it is not only in the "majority of cases" but in all cases the *surahs* are identical with the originals.

With regard to his classification of the *sûrahs* as early Makkan, Mid-Makkan, late Makkan and Madinan Nöldeke does not much modify his earlier position; but he now at least recognizes the difficulty involved in the task and the relative or subjective nature of his work. In particular he notes that "it is far easier to arrange in some sort of chronological order" the Madinan *sûrahs* than the Makkan, for "the revelations given in Medina frequently take notice of events about which

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[1] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th edition, 1891, Vol. 16, pp. 597 ff; reproduced in Ibn Warraq (ed.), *The Origins of the Koran Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1998, pp. 36-63.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

we have pretty accurate information" while, with regard to the Makkan revelations, allusions to well-known events are not so clear.[1] He further admits that although a considerable number of the short *sûrahs* may be recognized as the oldest and the others may be classified as mid-Makkan and late Makkan, with "regard to some suras, it may be doubtful whether they ought to be reckoned among the middle group, or with one or the other of the extremes. And it is altogether impossible, within these groups, to establish even a probable chronological arrangement of the individual revelations.... It is better, therefore, to rest satisfied with a merely relative determination of the order of even the three great clusters of Meccan revelations."[2]

III. Examination of Nöldeke's Assumptions

Thus, by Nöldeke's own admission, his chronological arrangement of the passages and *sûrahs* is only *probable* and *relative.* Even the criteria employed by him to make this admittedly uncertain and probable dating of the passages and *sûrahs* are wrong and illogical. He fixes his attention on what he supposes to be the differences in the literary style of the various parts of the Qur'ân and speaks of the "convulsive excitement" of the early group of *sûrahs* and passages, the gradual diminishing of the fervour and glow of the middle and late Makkan groups and the "prosaic" tone of the Madinan group. In doing so he is mistaken in two ways. He assumes that Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, himself composed the *sûrahs* and passages of the Qur'ân and that his literary style gradually declined with the passage of time. This assumption is belied by the literary history of any writer or language. If we look at the literary productions of any notable writer, such as Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw or Rabindranath Tagore, we seldom notice any gradual decline in their style and mode of writing over the years. The special style and impress of each writer can be easily detected in his early and later literary productions. If there is any change over the years, it is usually in the reverse direction of gradual improvement in the mode of expression and depth of thought. Any decline in the style of one's literary productions, if it ever takes place, is almost invariably connected with one's physical and mental decline. In the case of the Prophet nothing of the sort can be assumed. Moreover, the Meccan period of his mission lasted for only twelve years, coinciding with the prime of his life from the fortieth to the fifty-second year of his age. It is highly unreasonable to assume that his presumed literary style

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

underwent such a sharp decline within one decade that three distinct groups could be identified in his productions during this time!

Secondly, Nöldeke first assumes a gradual decline in the literary style of the Qur'ân and then applies this criterion for determining the dates of its passages and *sûrahs*. Such a procedure is methodologically improper and factually incorrect. Proper methodology requires the taking into consideration of the reported "occasions" of revelation of the different passages and *sûrahs*, as far as possible, and collating it with other available data for the purpose. Nöldeke has not done so and has often allowed his assumption to override the known "occasions" of the revelations. Factually, the generalization of gradual decline in the literary style of the Qur'ânic revelations is totally untenable. There are many passages of the Qur'ân identified by Nöldeke himself as Madinan that have similar rhyme, rhythm and strain as those of the Makkan *sûrahs*. There are of course differences in the mode of expression and phraseology depending on the themes and subjects dealt with; but throughout the Qur'ân has a distinctive and unique literary style. Any person having an acquaintance with the Qur'ân and Arabic language can easily distinguish any passage of the Qur'ân from any passage of any other Arabic literary production, medieval or modern. The utter untenability of Nöldeke's chronological arrangement of the Qur'ânic passages and *sûrahs* is highlighted by the fact that it is not accepted even by his fellow orientalists. Thus Rodwell came forward with a different chronological arrangement of the *surahs* in his translation of the Qur'ân which was published just one year after the first appearance of Nöldeke's work;[1] while William Muir made yet another chronological list a little afterwards.[2] Further divergent dating of the passages and *sûrahs* have been made by other subsequent orientalists. And all these are equally untenable and on similar grounds. Nor is the purpose of such an exercise, namely, to trace the psychological development of the Prophet by means of the Qur'ân, is likely to be fruitfully achieved; for, as Nöldeke further admits, "in such an undertaking one is always apt to take subjective assumptions and/or mere fancies for established data."[3]

Most objectionable are, however, Nöldeke's assumptions in connection with the collection and publication of the Qur'ân under 'Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân (r.a.). To begin with, he calls this work as the first and the second "redaction"

[1] J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran: Translated from the Arabic, the surahs arranged in chronological order, with notes and index*, London, 1861.

[2] See W. Muir, *The Qur'ân: Its composition and Teaching etc.*, London, 1897.

[3] Ibn Warraq, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

respectively of the Qur'ân. It must at once be pointed out that the word "redaction" has a wide meaning including editing, working into shape, reducing, preparing a version and the like. Subsequent orientalists have not only adopted this definition but have effected a transition from it to "recension", i. e., critical revision of a text. No editing, revision or new version of the Qur'ân was ever made, neither under 'Abû Bakr, nor under 'Uthmân (r.a.), nor subsequently. Nöldeke's characterizing the work of collecting the texts in one compilation as "redaction" is both incorrect and misleading.

Nöldeke so prefaces his account of the collection under 'Abû Bakr (r.a.) as to substantiate the notion of "redaction". Thus he says: "Many Muslims knew large portions by heart, but certainly no one knew the whole; and a merely oral propagation would have left the door open to all kinds of deliberate and inadvertent alterations."[1] Earlier he says that it cannot be supposed that the Prophet "knew the longer suras by heart so perfectly that he was able after a time to lay his finger upon any particular passage."[2] And now Nöldeke further states that the Prophet "himself had never thought of an authentic collection of his revelations," that "he was concerned only with the object of the moment" and had no idea that these "would be destroyed unless he made provision for their safe preservation" and that, being a "man destitute of literary culture", had "some difficulty in anticipating the fate of intellectual products."[3]

Now, Nöldeke is palpably wrong in each and every item of his above mentioned remarks and observations. First, he says that none of the Prophet's companions, not even the Prophet himself, knew the whole Qur'ân by heart. It is further said that he did not even perfectly remember the long *sûrahs*. This statement is grossly arbitrary and unwarranted. Many of the Prophet's companions, and the Prophet himself, knew the whole Qur'ân by heart. As already mentioned, there are authentic reports to the effect that at intervals, specially during the month of Ramaḍân, the Prophet used to recite the whole Qur'ân, as far as it was received, to the angel Jibrîl; and that during the last Ramaḍân of his life he recited the entire Qur'ân twice before that angel.[4] Nöldeke does not seem to be unaware of these reports; but he disregards these and does not give his reasons for doing so. He simply assumes that the Prophet could not have probably remembered the long *sûrahs*. In making this assumption Nöldeke

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[4] *Bukhârî*, nos. 1902, 4997, 4998.

seems to have been influenced by the fact that none in the West cares to remember any considerable part of his religious text and by his oversight of the fact that even today many of an ordinary Muslim learns the entire Qur'ân by heart and recites it entirely during the month-Long nightly (*tarâwîh*) prayer during Ramaḍân.

Secondly, Nöldeke is equally wrong in saying that "a merely oral propagation would have left the door open to all kinds of deliberate and inadvertent alterations." As already mentioned, the Qur'ân was not propagated merely orally. Simultaneously with oral transmission and memorization, it was preserved also in writing. Nöldeke himself notes a little earlier in his essay that at Makka the Prophet "had already begun to have his oracles committed to writing."[1] Nöldeke is here so much eager to assail the Qur'ân that he fails to see his own inconsistency in making the downright false suggestion that the Qur'ân was propagated merely orally leaving the door open for all kinds of deliberate and inadvertent alterations!

Thirdly, the undeniable fact that the Prophet had taken steps since an early period of his mission to have the Qur'ânic revelations written down, and Nöldeke's admission of this fact both illustrate the inconsistency and incorrectness of his other statement that the Prophet "himself had never thought of an authentic collection of his revelations", that he "was concerned only with the object of the moment" and had no idea that "these would be destroyed unless he made provision for their preservation", and that, being a "man destitute of literary culture" had "some difficulty in anticipating the fate of intellectual products." It is not at all true that the Prophet was "concerned only with the object of the moment". Not to mention his famous saying: "Convey from me even if it be an *'âyah*", the Qur'ân itself squarely belies this assumption. "And this Qur'ân has been communicated to me", says its *'âyah* 6:19, "that I may warn you therewith and those whom it reaches (و أوحى الى هذا القرآن لأنذركم به و من بلغ). And conscious of this fact he arranged for having each and every passage of the Qur'ân as it came down to him to be written down. Moreover, as an additional, and under the circumstances safer mode of preservation, he committed to memory each and every passage as it was revealed to him and taught his followers to do so. In fact, of all the Prophets and religious teachers, he is the only one who memorized his scripture and made it a religious duty for his followers to

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[1] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

memorize at least a good portion of it; for the obligatory prayers of the Muslims cannot be performed except on memorizing parts of the Qur'ân. Also, great religious merit was attached to memorizing the whole Qur'ân. Such provision is not to be found in the teachings of any other religious teacher. And as a result of such behest of the Prophet, thousands of Muslims do in fact commit the entire Qur'ân to memory even today. Nöldeke is totally wrong in saying that no Muslim, not even the Prophet, knew the whole Qur'ân by heart. As mentioned earlier, the Prophet and many of his companions knew the whole Qur'ân by heart. When he died, the whole Qur'ân was preserved through systematic memorization as well as in writing on suitable materials; though the written materials were not collected in one compilation. The very fact that the Qur'ânic revelations continued to come till the last few days of his life meant that the collection of the complete texts in one compilation had to be effected only after his death. That is exactly what was eventually done. Nothing could be farther from the truth than Nöldeke's statement that the "idea that the revelations would be destroyed" unless provision was made for their safe preservation "did not enter" the Prophet's mind.

Nöldeke also gives a twist to the account of Zayd ibn Thâbit's work of collection under Abû Bakr and says that Zayd collected the revelations from copies written on flat stones, pieces of leather, ribs of palm-leaves and such-like material, "but chiefly 'from the breasts of men' , i. e., from their memory. From these he wrote a fair copy, which he gave to Abu Bakr.... This redaction, commonly called *as-ṣuḥuf* ('the leaves'), had from the first no canonical authority; and its internal arrangement can only be conjectured."[1] Clearly the statement is based on the famous statement of Zayd given in *Bukhâri* and noted earlier; but Nöldeke gives a subtle twist by using the word "chiefly" before " from the breasts of men, i. ,e., from their memory", thereby giving the impression that part of the Qur'ân was collected from written copies but mostly it was collected from people's memory. This was not at all the case. There is no mention of "chiefly" or any other expression to that effect before the phrase "the breasts of men" mentioned in the report. The relevant part of the report runs as: "So I collected the Qur'ân from palm leaves, thin stones and bones and the hearts of men; and I found the last *'âyah* of *sûrat al-tawbah* with 'Abû Khuzaymah al-Anṣârî. I did not find it with anyone else." [2] It is noteworthy that Zayd does not say "and from the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[2] *Bukhârî*, n.o. 4986. The text runs as follows: فتتبعت القرآن أجمعه من العسب واللخاف و صدور الرجال و وجدت آخر سورت التوبة مع أبي خزيمة الأنصاري لم أجدها مع غيره

hearts of men" but simply "and the hearts of men". As already mentioned,[1] he was instructed to compare the memorized texts with the written copies and this statement of his means that he made the collection by comparing the written copies with the texts memorized by the Prophet's Companions. This is clear from the last part of the statement which says that he found the last *'âyah* of *sûrat al-Tawbah* with Abû Khuzaymah al-Anṣâri which he did not find with anyone else. Zayd himself knew the Qur'ân by heart and knew that the *'âyah* in question was the last *'âyah* of *sûrat al-Tawbah*; but he did not include it in the collection until he found a written copy of it. This shows the extreme care taken in making the collection and in ensuring that nothing but the texts preserved in writing as well as in memory was included in it.

As regards the preparation and distribution of authorized copies of the Qur'ân during the *khilâfah* of 'Uthmân, Nöldeke makes a number of assumptions. First, he says that Zayd ibn Thâbit and the other members of the commission who were entrusted with the task "brought together as many copies as they could lay their hands on, and prepared an edition which was to be canonical for all Muslims.."[2] Then he says that "we have no trustworthy information" about how they carried out the work. "It now seems to me highly probable", asserts Nöldeke, "that this second redaction took this simple form: Zaid read off from the codex which he had previously written, and his associates, simultaneously or successively, wrote one copy each to his dictation. These I suppose, were the three copies which, we are informed, were sent to the capitals Damascus, Basra, and Kufa..."[3]

Now, these two statements of Nöldeke are clearly confusing and inconsistent. If Zayd and his associates got hold of as many codices as possible and prepared an edition out of them, then the second statement that Zayd read out from the codex previously made and his colleagues simply made copies on his dictation is incorrect and confusing. In fact, as already mentioned, they used the previously made copy to prepare authorized copies for sending them to the different provinces, making the spelling and vocalization uniform in order to eliminate the differences in readings that had cropped up. It was neither a "second redaction" nor "an edition" as Nöldeke calls it. No alteration of, addition to or subtraction from the existing text was made. The sources describe the details of how the

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[1] *Supra*, p. 200.

[2] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[3] *Ibid.*

work was done. Nöldeke's statement that we have "no trustworthy information" about it is not correct; and what he states under the proviso "It now seems to me highly probable" is in fact only a contradiction of what he states earlier as the preparation of an "edition" on the basis of as many codices as possible. Both his contradictory statements are symptomatic of his attempts at confusing and twisting the facts.

About the arrangement of the texts Nöldeke observes that a subject-wise classification was impracticable because of the variety of subjects dealt with in a *sûrah*; while a "chronological arrangement was out of the question, because the chronology of the older pieces must have been imperfectly known, and because in some cases passages of different dates had been joined together... The pieces were accordingly arranged in indiscriminate order... The combination of pieces of different origin may proceed partly from the possessors of the codices from which Zaid compiled his first complete copy, partly from Zaid himself."[1]

This last statement of Nöldeke is a further admission on his part that the so-called "codices", i. e., the written copies with the Companions, were used for making the "first complete copy" under Abû Bakr, not what is called the "second redaction" or "an edition" under 'Uthmân. Also, Nöldeke's present statement about the impracticability of arranging the Qur'ânic passages in chronological order highlights the indefinite and conjectural nature of his own chronological arrangement of the *sûrahs* and passages of the Qur'ân. Be that as it may, his statement that Zayd or the possessors of the codices arranged the Qur'ânic pieces in indiscriminate order or combined the pieces of different origin as they thought fit is completely wrong and contrary to a number of well-established facts. First, not only most short *sûrahs* and *sûrahs* of medium length, but some of the long *sûrahs* were revealed in full. Second, the Prophet had been giving out the Qur'ânic passages and *sûrahs* to his followers for a period of twenty-three years, teaching them to recite and memorize them and repeatedly emphasizing that the *sûrahs* and passages constituted a *Kitâb* (Scripture). He and the believers had also been regularly saying the daily and weekly congregational prayers reciting the *sûrahs* . It is therefore absurd to suppose that he washed his hands off by simply giving out the passages and did not indicate how to arrange them in *sûrahs* and in the Book.

Third, Zayd and those whom Nöldeke calls "possessors of the codices" were none else than the Prophet's scribes and Companions to whom he gave out the

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

passages. It can by no means be supposed that they had no other interest in the matter except their employment as scribes and did not enquire of the Prophet whether the pieces they were required to write were each independent *sûrahs* or parts of *sûrahs,* and if the latter, which pieces belonged to which *sûrahs* and in what order. In fact, there is a positive evidence that the Prophet, when he gave out separate passages of the Qur'ân, indicated the *sûrahs* and the order in which they were to be placed.[1]

Fourth, and more positively, we have a number of reports mentioning the specific *sûrahs* which the Prophet used to recite in full in some of the prayers. Thus, one report says that sometimes he used to recite *sûrahs* 50 (*Qâf*) and 54 (*al-Qamar*) in the *'Îd* prayers.[2] Another report says that he used to recite *sûrahs* 32 (*al-Sajdah*) and 76 (*al-Insân*) in the early dawn prayer and *sûrahs* 62 and 63 (*al-Jumu'ah* and *al-Munâfiqûn*) in the congregational prayer on Friday.[3] Other reports also mention the Prophet's recitation of *sûrat al-Baqarah* (no. 2), *sûrat 'Âl 'Imrân* (no. 3), *sûrat al-'Isrâ'* (no. 17), *sûrat al-Kahf* (no. 18), *sûrat Mryam* (no.19), *sûrat Tâ-Hâ* (no. 20) and *sûrat al-'Anbiyâ'* (no. 21) completely and often consecutively in different prayers.[4] Bint 'Abd al-Raḥmân and Bint Ḥârithah ibn al-Nu'mân state that they both memorized *sûrah* 50 (*Qâf*) simply by listening to it from the Prophet who used to recite it in his *sermon* (*khuṭbah*) on Friday.[5] These facts indisputably establish the fact that the passages had been arranged into *sûrahs* during the time of the Prophet.

Fifth, there are a number of reports that the Prophet mentioned the special merits of reciting some *sûrahs.* Thus, he specially recommended the frequent recitation of *sûrat al-Baqarah* and *'Âl 'Imrân* (nos. 2 and 3) saying that they would be of immense merit for their reciters on the Day of Judgement.[6] Another group of reports speak about the Prophet's having attached special merit for reciting *sûrat al-Fâtiḥah* and the last three *'âyahs* of *sûrat al-Baqarah.*[7] The very fact that the first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân was called by the Prophet *al-Fâtiḥah* or *Fâtiḥat al-Kitâb* (the Opener or the Opening Chapter of the Book) proves that he had arranged the order of the *sûrahs* in the Book. A yet another report speaks about the Prophet's mentioning the merits of reciting *sûrat al-Kahf* (no. 18).[8]

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1 *Musnad,* I, pp. 57, 69. See also al-Suyûtî, *op. cit.,* pp. 174-180.
2 *Muslim,* no. 891.
3 *Ibid.,* nos. 879-880; *Bukhârî,* nos. 891, 1068.
4 See al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân,* I, pp. 172-173.
5 *Muslim,* nos. 872-873.
6 *Muslim,* nos. 804-805.
7 *Ibid.,* nos. 806-808.

Sixth, there are another group of reports which show that towards the end of his life the Prophet used to recite the whole Qur'ân dividing it into seven parts and specified them as, apart from *sûrat al-Fâtiḥah*, first three *sûrahs,* then five *sûrahs*, then seven, then nine, then eleven, then thirteen and finally the rest from *sûrat al-Qâf*.[2] It is to be observed that the first six parts with *sûrat al-Fâtiḥah* make up exactly the first 49 *sûrahs* and *sûrat Qâf* stands as the *sûrah* no. 50 in the Qur'ân. All these reports show that the passages and *'âyahs* of the *sûrahs* had been arranged and the order of the *sûrahs* had been fixed during the life-time of the Prophet. This arrangement was made by him according to the direction received from Allah. As already mentioned, the Prophet used to recite the whole Qur'ân as far as it was given to him before the angel Jibrîl during the month of Ramaḍân each year, and during the last Ramaḍân of his life he did so twice.[3]

Last but not least, it is also to be remembered that the collection and distribution of the Qur'ân in one compilation was made within some twenty years of the Prophet's death and all the four of his closest Companions, Abû Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmân and 'Alî (r.a.) were involved in the task. They had been constantly with the Prophet since the beginning of his mission and had been the first few persons to have knowledge of any Qur'ânic revelation given out by the Prophet. They also memorized most if not the whole of the Qur'ânic texts. And there are reports mentioning their recitation of long *sûrahs* in prayers. It is stated by 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr that he performed the dawn prayer behind 'Abû Bakr and he recited the entire *sûrat al-Baqarah* in its two *raka'ahs*.[4] 'Abd Allah ibn 'Âmir ibn Rabî'ah says that he performed the dawn prayer behind 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb and he recited *sûrat Yûsuf* (no. 12) and *sûrat al-Ḥajj* (no. 22) in the two *raka'ahs* respectively.[5] Al-Furâfisah ibn 'Umayr al-Ḥanafî states that he memorized *sûrat Yûsuf* simply by listening to its frequent recitation by 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân in the dawn prayer.[6] It was under the instruction and supervision of these four Companions and successors of the Prophet that the compilation of the Qur'ân was made. Hence it is simply unreasonable to think that they allowed Zayd and his colleagues to combine the Qur'ânic passages into *sûrahs* and to set their order in the Qur'ân indiscriminately.

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1 *Ibid.*, no. 809.
2 See *'Abû Dâwud,* nos. 1388-1393; *Musnad*, IV, pp. 9, 343; *Ibn Mâjah*, nos. 1345-1348; *Tayâlisî*, no. 1108.
3 *Bukhârî*, nos. 1902, 4997, 4998. See also *supra*, p. 184.
4 *Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, *Kitâb al-Ṣalâh, Bâb al-Qirâ'ah fî al-Ṣabâḥ*, no. 33.
5 *Ibid.*, no. 34.
6 *Ibid.*, no. 35.

Thus the facts and reason both equally give a big lie to Nöldeke's statement that the Prophet did not care to arrange the passages into *sûrahs,* nor to provide for their preservation nor to set their order in the Qur'ân.

Another assumption of Nöldeke's is about the disjointed letters at the beginning of some *sûrahs.* "At one time I suggested", he says, "that these initials did not belong to Muhammad's text, but might be the monograms of possessors of codices, which, through negligence on the part of editors, were incorporated in the final form of the Koran; but I now deem it more probable that they are to be traced to the Prophet himself... Muhammad seems to have meant these letters for a mystic reference to the archetypal text in heaven... The Prophet himself can hardly have attached any particular meaning to these symbols: they served their purpose if they conveyed an impression of solemnity and enigmatical obscurity."[1] Now, this last remark is related essentially to the attitude of Nöldeke and the orientalists in general to the Qur'ânic *waḥy* which has been dealt with in a previous section of the present work.[2] Here it may only be pointed out that had the Prophet intended by these disjointed letters only to "convey an impression of solemnity and enigmatical obscurity" to his utterances, he would have done so with regard to all the *sûrahs* and passages he gave out, not simply with regard to only 29 out of 114 *sûrahs.* The revised supposition of Nöldeke is as unreasonable as is his previous one.

Finally, Nöldeke states that "'Uthmân's Koran was not complete"[3] and says that "a few detached pieces are still extant which were originally parts of the Koran" and which the Prophet would not have suppressed but "they have been omitted by Zaid." Having said this Nöldeke adds: "Zaid may easily have overlooked a few stray fragments, but that he purposely omitted anything which he believed to belong to the Koran is very unlikely."[4] Next he refers to the copies of texts (*maṣâḥif*) belonging to Ubay ibn Ka'b and 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd and says that the former contained "substantially the same materials" and so "Ubai ibn Ka'b must have used the original collection of Zaid"; but "it embodied two additional short prayers, whose authenticity I do not now venture to question, as I formerly did." And as regards the "codex" of Ibn Mas'ûd it omits *sûrahs* 1, 113 and 114.[5]

[1] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.
[2] *Supra,* chapters IV-VII.
[3] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Now, in making the claim that Zayd had omitted some "detached pieces" of the Qur'ân Nöldeke only relies on his supposition that "Zayd may easily have overlooked a few stray fragments". In fact Nöldeke himself overlooks the fact that the collection of the Qur'ân by Zayd was not his private and solo effort. He was commissioned by the state and, on the second occasion under 'Uthmân, was assisted by three other equally competent persons. And on both the occasions his work was supervised by the principal Companions of the Prophet and it was checked and compared not only with the extant written copies but also with what the *ḥuffâẓ* (Qur'ân memorizers) knew. It is therefore simply unreasonable to suppose that "Zaid may easily have overlooked a few stray fragments." Nöldeke's initial statement that Zayd omitted some "detached pieces" which the Prophet would not have suppressed is a totally baseless, unsubstantiated and an unjust allegation. If by "some detached pieces" or "a few stray fragments" Nöldeke means "the two additional prayers" in Ubay ibn Ka'b's "codex", it is to be pointed out that some of the Companions used to write explanatory notes and prayer formulas (*du'âs*) and keep them along with their copies of the Qur'ânic texts. Nöldeke himself admits that he at first entertained doubts about the authenticity about these two short prayers; but he does not give his reasons why he does not "now venture to question" their authenticity. Be that as it may, Ubay ibn Ka'b himself was alive and present at the time of the collection made by Zayd and accepted and approved of it. So did Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd whose "codex", as Nöldeke notes, rather lacked three short *sûrahs*. It may also be pointed out that some other Companions had also made their personal copies of the texts which varied in contents and order of the *sûrahs*. For instance, 'Alî ibn Abî Ṭâlib had his own copy which he had made in the chronological order. But all these persons co-operated with, supervised and checked the collection made by Zayd and his colleagues, approved of it and accepted it. And Nöldeke himself, in spite of his attempts at creating confusion and doubt, concludes: "Now, when we consider that at that time there were many Muslims who had heard the Koran from the mouth of the Prophet, that other measures of the imbecile 'Uthman met with the most vehement resistance on the part of the bigoted champions of the faith, that these were still further incited against him by some of his ambitious old comrades, until at last they murdered him, and finally that in the civil wars after his death the several parties were glad of any pretext for branding their opponents as infidels, – when we consider all this, we must regard it as a strong testimony in

favour of 'Uthman's Koran, that no party – that of 'Ali not excepted – repudiated the text formed by Zaid..."[1] And we also – the readers – consider these lines the strongest contradiction by Nöldeke himself of what he dogmatically asserts earlier of 'Uthmân's Qur'ân being incomplete and of Zayd's having omitted some stray fragments of it.

Thus, all the main assumptions and theories of Nöldeke about the history of the Qur'ân are conjectural and untenable. His chronological order of the passages and *sûrahs* are conjectural by his own admission and are not accepted by even the other orientalists who attempt at making similarly conjectural and varying chronological arrangements. His earlier and later assumptions about the disjointed letters at the beginning of some *sûrahs* are wildly speculative and do not stand reason. His statement that the Prophet did not care to provide for the preservation of the Qur'ânic texts and was merely concerned with the need of the moment is against reason and all the undeniable facts to the contrary. His assumption that Zayd ibn Thâbit or the "possessors of the codices" combined the separately revealed passages of the Qur'ân into *sûrahs* and arranged the later in their present order is equally baseless and untenable. And his statement that Zayd omitted some disjointed or stray passages of the Qur'ân and that therefore the 'Uthmânic Qur'ân is incomplete is completely wrong.

Nöldeke makes other remarks and assumptions about the Qur'ân. Thus, reflecting Muir's view about the Qur'ânic *waḥy* he says that the Prophet gave out the revelations after "epileptic fits" and "it is impossible to say whether the trick was in the utterance of the revelation or in the fit itself."[2] "But by far", he further says, "the greatest part of the book is undoubtedly the result of deliberation... Many of the passages are based upon purely intellectual reflection."[3] Again, reflecting the Muir-Sprenger views, Nöldeke states that the Qur'ân is composed of materials derived from Judaeo-Christian sources and is otherwise a heterogeneous collection consisting of disjointed facts and ideas.[4] About its literary style also he closely toes the line adopted by Muir and Sprenger and says that the "greater part of the Koran is decidedly prosaic; much of it is indeed stiff in style."[5] Also, following Sprenger, Nöldeke states that the Prophet used a number of foreign words in the Qur'ân, as is "the tendency of the imperfectly

[1] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 54.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

educated to delight in out-of-the-way expressions", and in order to impress his listeners.[1] Further, Nöldeke says that the Prophet used to "introduce improvements" upon what he had previously given out.[2] And speaking about the effect of the Qur'ân on the Arabs in general Nöldeke observes that "they had outgrown their ancient religion".[3]

And just as Nöldeke himself had adopted and exaggerated some of the ideas and assumptions of his predecessors, similarly his successor orientalists like David Margoliouth, Arthur Jeffery, Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt took over from him and inflated his ideas and assumptions out of all proportions. The assumptions about the Qur'ânic *waḥy* and the theme of borrowing from Judaeo-Christian sources have already been dealt with. The remarks about the text and style of the Qur'ân shall be discussed in a subsequent chapter. Here it is necessary to note that Nöldeke's hint about the copies of Qur'ânic texts (*maṣâḥif*) belonging to some Companions and the alleged incompleteness of the 'Uthmânic Qur'ân, the alleged revision of it by the Prophet, the existence of "foreign words" in it and such other remarks have been taken up by his successors and inflated to further unreasonable proportions. The following chapter takes into consideration such inflation of Nöldeke's assumptions and suggestions.

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'ÂN: II. INFLATION OF NÖLDEKE'S ASSUMPTIONS

I. ARTHUR JEFFERY'S *MATERIALS ETC.*

Of those who have taken over Nöldeke's assumptions and have built further assumptions upon them mention may specially be made of Arthur Jeffery whose *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ân The Old Codices* appeared in 1937.[1] This work is based on the wrong assumption of Nöldeke that the 'Uthmanic Qur'ân is "incomplete" because there exist a number of other "codices", i. e., copies of the Qur'ânic text, with variant materials and readings. Jeffery himself very clearly indicates his indebtedness to Nöldeke in the Introduction to the work. Thus after stating somewhat incorrectly that critical investigation of the text of the Qur'ân is still in its infancy and that no "definite attempt" has hitherto been made "to construct any type of critical text of the Qur'ân" he states: "Nöldeke opened it up in 1860 in the first edition of his *Geschischte des Qorans*, and Goldziher drew attention to its importance in the first lecture of his *Richtungen,*[2] but it received no systematic treatment until Bergsträsser undertook his *Geschischte des Qorantexts* as the third part of the revised edition of Nöldeke's work..."[3] In fact both Bergsträsser and Jeffery planned a joint venture in this respect. In a footnote to the above statement Jeffery writes: " Bergsträsser envisaged a much larger plan for a history of the text of the Qur'ân based on an assemblage of materials on a vast scale, and of which the publication of a critical text of the Qur'ân by the present writer [i. e., Jeffery] was to form part."[4] The plan did not materialize because of the death of Bergsträsser in 1933; but the project was continued by Jeffery in his own way of which the result is his *Materials etc.* under discussion.

Jeffery sufficiently reflects his motive and conclusion in the title of the work which in its full runs as: *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ân - The Old Codices - The Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif of Ibn Abî Dâud together with a Collection of the variant Readings from the Codices of Ibn Mas'ûd, Ubai, 'Alî, Ibn 'Abbâs, Anas, Abû Mûsa and other Early Qur'ânic authorities which represent a Type of Text Anterior to that of the canonical Text of 'Uthmân.* Now this title, to begin with, is misleading in two main respects. First, it tends to give the impression that the "variant readings" noted in

[1] Printed for the Trustees of the "De Goeje Fund" by E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1937.
[2] *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranuslegung,* Leiden, 1920.
[3] A. Jeffery, *Materials etc.,* pp. 3-4.
[4] *Ibid.,* n. 6.

the book are taken from the "codices" of the persons named, while the fact is that the "variant readings" recorded are not directly from the "codices" as such but from what is noted and reported by others, the exegetes and lexicographers, as having come down from the codices mentioned. Second, the concluding part of the title, namely, that the variant readings noted "represent a type of text *anterior* to that of the canonical text of 'Uthmân" is grossly misleading. It is to be noted that the persons of whose codices are mentioned by Jeffery were all Companions of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, and were contemporaries of one another and of Zayd ibn Thâbit who himself had one copy of the text of the Qur'ân and who was one of those in charge of making what is called the "canonical text of 'Uthmân". 'Uthmân himself was a senior contemporary of all these persons and they were all alive at the time of making the compilation under him. The "codices" of the persons mentioned were and could only be "contemporary" with the "codices" of Zayd and others of the Prophet's Companions. They were copies of the same text as given out by the Prophet and by no means "anterior" or posterior to one another. Jeffery's title gives the false impression as if the codices mentioned were "older" copies and the copy made under 'Uthmân was something of a "later" work. This is by no means the case. The different codices or copies were made simultaneously by the Prophet's Companions and were in no way different texts of the Qur'ân, though they differed in respect of completeness.

As regards Jeffery's work itself, it falls into two distinct parts. The first part consists of an Introduction and listings of the "variant readings" of some Qur'ânic expressions as gleaned from a number of exegesis and Arabic lexicographical works, arranged under the names of the "codices" from which these readings are reported to have been quoted. In the Introduction Jeffery mentions some 15 "primary codices" including those of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb (d. 29 H.), 'Alî ibn Abî Ṭâlib (d. 40 H.), Ubay ibn Ka'b (d. 29 H.), 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd (d. 33 H.), Ḥafṣah (d. 45 H.), Zayd ibn Thâbit (d. 48), 'Â'ishah (d. 58) and 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73) [may Allah be pleased with them]. Mention is also made of some "secondary codices" based on the "primary codices."[1]

The second part of the work consists of Abû Bakr ibn Dâud's (d. 316 H.) *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif*, edited by Jeffery using a manuscript of it preserved in the Zâhiriya Library at Damascus. This latter work gives an account of the compilation of the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Qur'ân under 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân (r. a.) together with a description of some of the old codices (*maṣâḥif*). Jeffery deserves thanks for thus making available to the public this valuable work on Qur'ânic studies. It must not be supposed, however, that the work was unknown before this edition by Jeffery. Many classical and medieval Muslim scholars used and referred to this work of Ibn Abî Dâud. For instance Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalânî (d. 852 H.) uses and refers to this work in his famous commentary on *Bukhârî* (*Fatḥ al-Bârî*), specially in his explanation of the reports relating to the collection of the Qur'ân (*bâb jam' al-Qur'ân*).[1] This second part of Jeffery's work thus does not call for discussion and analysis. Nor do the variant readings noted by the exegetes and lexicographers call for any special remarks; for Muslims recognise and accept some variation in vocalisation and recitation due principally to the absence of dots (*nuqaṭ*) and vowel signs (*ḥarakât*) in the early Arabic script, as noted earlier.

What is specially remarkable, however, is Jeffery's motive in tabulating the variant readings from the works of the Muslims themselves. His declared objective is to show that the 'Uthmanic text is only *one* of the many "rival" and "widely divergent" texts and that therefore the present Qur'ân is neither "complete" nor, by implication, quite authentic. He also aims at preparing what he calls a "critical text" of the Qur'ân. Leaving aside this latter aim of his, which he did not or could not accomplish, the assumptions that he makes to prove his thesis are all wrong and misconceived, as we shall presently see.

His first assumption, or rather arbitrary assertion, is that the account found in the Muslim sources about the compilation of the Qur'ânic text – the "orthodox Muslim theory of the text" as he calls it – is "largely fictitious". He does not give any reason for calling the Muslim account "fictitious"; but it is easy to see why he does so. His theory that the copies (codices) made by the Companions were different and divergent texts and that 'Uthmân adopted only one of the many "rival texts" cannot be sustained unless doubts could be created about the Muslim account. In the event, while casting doubt on the Muslim account, he takes up facts and bits of information from that account and, by twisting and distorting them, advances a series of misleading suggestions.

Thus, first, Jeffery states that when the Prophet died "there was no Qur'ân left ready as a heritage for the community."[2] This is a grossly wrong and misleading statement. The Prophet, as is well known, gave out to the public and his followers

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[1] *Ibn Ḥajar, Fatḥ al-Bârî*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azîz ibn Bâz, vol. IX, pp.17-21.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

each and every passage of the revelations as he received these. He continued to do so throughout the twenty-three years of his mission. These were also written down under his direction and at his dictation by a number of selected Companions, the "scribes". A great many of the Companions also learnt by heart the *sûrahs* as they were given out by him. 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd, of whose written copy of the Qur'ân text (codex) Jeffery specially mentions, states that he memorized more than 70 *sûrahs* (بضعا و سبعين سورة)of the Qur'ân simply by hearing them from the lips of the Prophet.[1] It is to be noted that the thirtieth *juz'* of the Qur'ân consisting of the short *sûrahs* contain only 41 *sûrahs*. So almost an equal number of long *sûrahs* must have been included in the more than seventy *sûrahs* memorized by 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd. That the long *sûrahs* memorized by him included *sûrat al-Nisâ'* (no. 4) is proved by his other statement that he once recited this particular *sûrah* unto the Prophet.[2] The Qur'ân was thus already in the possession of the community before the Prophet's death. The Companions of the Prophet not simply wrote down and memorized the Qur'ân; they lived and conducted themselves by its teachings. The Prophet had not only delivered to them the Qur'ân but also trained them as living examples of the teachings of the Qur'ân.

Jeffery's emphasis is obviously on what he describes as "collected, arranged, collated body of revelations"; but even that innuendo is not correct. The Prophet, as noted earlier, had arranged the "revelations" into *sûrahs* and had also set the order of the *sûrahs*. Jeffery cites in this connection the researches of Bell and Torrey and suggests that the Prophet had kept in his own care a considerable mass of revelation, "some of it in revised and some of it in unrevised form", intending it to be given out to his community as a *kitâb* which he could not accomplish due to his sudden death. We shall presently deal with Bell's untenable theory of revision of the Qur'ân by the Prophet. He did indeed have in his care a considerable mass of the revelations written down on different materials; but he did never revise any text of the Qur'ân nor did he ever withhold any single passage of it with a view to revising it. Nor is there any single instance of a Qur'ânic passage having been reissued in an altered and revised form. The whole innuendo is based on a fundamental misconception that the Prophet himself wrote the texts of the Qur'ân and continued to revise and correct them before giving them out as a book to his community. Further, Jeffery attempts to confuse

[1] *Bukhârî*, no. 5000; *Muslim*, n. 2462; *Musnad*, I, pp. 389, 405, 414, 442.
[2] *Bukhârî*, no. 5055; *Muslim*, no. 800.

the reader by suggesting that the fate of the materials that remained with the Prophet is uncertain – "we are at a loss to know what became of this material, which obviously would have been the community's most precious legacy."[1] The absurdity of this remark is highlighted by Jeffery's virtual contradiction of it on the very next page of his text where he says that 'Abû Bakr "may possibly have inherited material that the prophet had stored away in preparation of the *Kitâb*."[2]

Jeffery cannot deny the fact of the revelations having been preserved in writing as well as through memorization. Hence he attempts to belittle these facts or to create confusion about these. Thus Jeffery says: "The Prophet had proclaimed his messages orally, and, except in the latter period of his ministry, whether they were recorded or not was often a matter of chance."[3] Now, this statement of Jeffery's is wrong and misleading. It is not only in the latter period, i.e., at Madina, that the revelations were written down. The process had started at Makka, as acknowledged even by Nöldeke, and it was then not simply a "matter of chance". It is unreasonable to think that the Prophet, having taken steps to have the revelations written down, would have then left it to a "matter of chance". With regard to the scribes employed by the Prophet to write down the revelations Jeffery says that "these amanuenses" could have been "at times called upon to write out special pieces of revelation" but they cannot be taken to be "a body of prepared scribes waiting to take down revelations as they were uttered."[4] It is not clear what Jeffery means by the expression "a body of prepared scribes". The scribes did not of course wait to take down revelations as they were uttered; but they were called upon at appropriate times to write down the revelations as the Prophet dictated these to them. Jeffery's suggestion that they were called upon only to write down "special pieces of revelations" is totally unwarranted. There is no evidence to suggest that the Prophet took care only to have the so-called special pieces of revelation written down. As for these so-called special pieces of revelation Jeffery says: "Some pieces of revelation material seem to have been used liturgically and so probably would have been written."[5] This statement of Jeffery's in fact betrays his lack of understanding of the nature of the Muslim prayer and the use in it of the Qur'ân. It is not "some pieces" of the Qur'ân but any and every part of it can be and is used for the Muslim prayer. Also, such use

[1] Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, n. 1.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

of the Qur'ân in prayer is made not in the form of reading out from a written piece, as is done in the Christian liturgy, but from memory, either silently or audibly. Similarly misconceived and unwarranted is Jeffery's statement that "some pieces" the Prophet "himself caused to be written down in permanent form as they were of a definite legislative character."[1] Once again it needs to be pointed out that there is no evidence in the sources to suggest that the Prophet caused to be written down only the pieces of revelation that were of a "definite legislative character". The fact is that Jeffery, while admitting the fact of the revelations having been written down, attempts at the same time to belittle or to create confusion about it.

The same thing he does with regard to the fact of memorization of the Qur'ânic texts. Thus he states: "Certain individuals among the early Muslims, perhaps even a little before the Prophet's death, had specialized in collecting or memorizing this revelation material." They came to be known as the *Qurrâ'* and were "as it were the depository of revelation."[2] The process of memorization as well as writing down of the revelations had started right from the beginning of the Prophet's mission, not "a little before" his death. In fact, it speaks of the great wisdom and prudence of the Prophet that he took simultaneous steps to have the revelations memorized as well as written down. These were thus preserved both in writing as well as through memorization by the Companions, many of whom had, before his death, learnt the whole Qur'ân by heart, while many others had memorized a good deal of it. This dual process of preservation had the additional advantage of checking the one with the other. The Prophet specially emphasized the practice of memorization and attached great merit to it. That the revelations were not collected into one compilation before his death was because these continued to come down till the last day of the Prophet's life. Yet, he had arranged the separately revealed pieces into *sûrahs* and had also set the order of the *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân. By the very nature of things the collection of the *sûrahs* into one compilation had to be done after his death; and that is exactly what was done by his immediate successor, 'Abû Bakr. And in doing so, he did not miss the implication of the Prophet's practice of having the Qur'ânic texts both written down and committed to memory. Hence in making the compilation he required the written text to be compared with the memorized text, and vice versa, and nothing was included in the compilation that did not meet this strict criterion.

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*

Also, even when the written compilation was completed, the process of memorization was not discouraged or discontinued, so that even today Muslims can count in their ranks millions of *ḥuffâẓ* (Retainers of the full Qur'ân in memory).

This fact of 'Abû Bakr's having had the compilation of the Qur'ân made on a meticulous comparison of the written copies of the text with the memorized text militates against Jeffery's main theory that the 'Uthmânic copy was one of many different and divergent "codexes". Hence he attempts to create doubts about the compilation made by Abû Bakr. Jeffery writes: "That Abû Bakr was one of those who collected revelation material was doubtless true". He "possibly inherited material that the Prophet had stored away in preparation for the *kitâb*"; but that he "ever made an official recension as the orthodox theory demands is exceedingly doubtful. His collection would have been a purely private affair, just as quite a number of other Companions of the Prophet had made personal collections as private affairs."[1]

Now, it is not the so-called "orthodox theory" but a number of authentic reports that speak about the compilation made by 'Abû Bakr. Jeffery does not give any reason for questioning the authenticity of these particular reports and arbitrarily describes the account as "exceedingly" doubtful. But leaving aside the reports, what Jeffery suggests is contrary to reason and the nature of things. 'Abû Bakr was not at the time merely one among a number of other Companions of the Prophet. He was the immediate successor (*khalîfah*) of the Prophet and was in charge of the guidance of the Muslims and the administration of the state, for both of which the Qur'ân was in constant use. Jeffery acknowledges that 'Abû Bakr himself was one of those who had collected "the revelation material" and had also "possibly" inherited the material "that the Prophet had stored away in preparation for the *kitâb*." It is also reasonable to assume that he was aware of the collections made by the other Companions like 'Alî, Sâlim, 'Abû Mûsa al-'Ash'arî, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd and Ubay ibn Ka'b, all of whom were present in Madina and were in close association with him in conducting the affairs of the Muslims and in administering the state. As successor of the Prophet it was only natural on the part of 'Abû Bakr that he should have taken steps to make a compilation of the *kitâb* for which the materials had been left by the Prophet. It is also natural that in doing so he would have taken into account not only his own collection

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

and the material inherited from the Prophet, but also the collections made by the other Companions, who were by no means individuals isolated from one another, as Jeffery would seem to suggest.

Secondly, in the immediately preceding paragraph of his text Jeffery mentions that it was the "slaughter of a great number" of *qurrâ'* (Qur'ân readers) at the Battle of Yamâma in 12 H. that "caused interest to be aroused in getting all the revelation material set down in permanent written form".[1] He does not, however, follow or mention the sequence. The Battle of Yamâma in 12 H. was an important event during 'Abû Bakr's *khilâfah* and it was indeed the death of a number of Qur'ân memorizers in that battle which turned his and his colleagues' attention to the question of having the Qur'ân written down in one compilation. In fact the report about this compilation work under 'Abû Bakr mentions the death of a number of Qur'ân readers at the Battle of Yamâma as the immediate occasion for this work. Jeffery's double standard permits him to accept only one part of the report and to arbitrarily doubt or sidetrack the other part of the same report. Had he been consistent and reasonable enough in his thinking he would have asked himself the question: What happened after interest had been aroused in the matter in consequence of the slaughter of many Qur'ân readers at the Battle of Yamâma? Had he done so, he would have found the answer in the report and would not have tried to mislead his readers by saying that 'Abû Bakr's making of "an official recension" is "exceedingly doubtful."

In fact, what the report says is just a natural follow-on to the interest aroused by the killing of a number of Qur'ân readers at Yamâma. As already mentioned, 'Abû Bakr, in consultation with 'Umar and other senior Companions, appointed Zayd ibn Thâbit to gather the Qur'ânic texts in one written compilation, instructing him to compare every memorized text with the written one and vice versa. He also made a public announcement asking everyone who had with him any Qur'ânic text, written or memorized, to submit it to either Zayd or 'Umar who were asked to remain in attendance for the purpose at the Prophet's Mosque.[2] The selection of Zayd was made on the consideration that he had been the scribe who remained with the Prophet till the last moment of his life and was also present at the last two recitations of the complete Qur'ân by the Prophet during the last year of his life. In describing his work Zayd himself states: "...so I tracked the collection of the Qur'ân from palm-leaves and bones and hearts of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[2] See *supra*, pp. 200-201.

men, till I found the last part of *sûrat al-tawbah* with Abû Khuzaymah al-Ansârî. I did not find it with anyone else."[1] He further says: "When we wrote down the Qur'ân we did not find one *'âyah* of [*sûrat*] *al-'Ahzâb* which I used to hear the Messenger of Allah recite; so we made a search for it and found it with Khuzaymah ibn Thâbit al-Ansârî..."[2]

Three things become clear from the above. First, the collection and compilation was made on a comparison of the written texts with the memorized texts. This is very clear from both the above quoted statements of Zayd's, particularly his second statement in which he says that although he remembered the particular *'âyah* of *sûrat al-'Ahzâb* and heard the Messenger of Allah reciting it, he did not include it in the compilation until he found its written copy with Khuzaymah ibn Thâbit. Second, it is also clear that every effort was made to track down whatever anyone had in his possession of either a written or a memorized text. And as all the four principal Companions, 'Abû Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmân and 'Alî, together with other Companions like 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd, Sâlim, Ubay ibn Ka'b, 'Â'ishah, 'Abû Mûsâ al-'Ash'arî and others were all present at Madina and in close touch with the *khalîfah* 'Abû Bakr in all his work, it is obvious that the written copies that they had with them were duly compared and taken into consideration. Third, the statement that the written copy of the "last part" of *sûrat al-tawbah* was found only with 'Abû Khuzaymah and no one else makes it clear that the order of the various passages of any particular *sûrah* had already been fixed by the Prophet.

Thus a collection of the Qur'ânic texts in one written compilation was made during 'Abû Bakr's *khilâfah*. This fact is implicit even in Jeffery's own theory that 'Uthmân canonized "the Madinan Codex".[3] The latter can only mean the master copy prepared under the direction of 'Abû Bakr. Strangely and inconsistently enough, in a footnote to this statement Jeffery attempts to deny the existence of any codex at Madina by saying: "Assuming that there was a Madinan Codex. The stories of 'Uthmân's Committee ... suggest that Madina had depended largely on oral tradition and that this Committee of 'Uthmân made a first hand collection by taking down the material directly from the depositories and demanding two witnesses for every revelation accepted."[4] If Madina had no "codex" till 'Uthmân's

[1] *Bukhârî*, no. 4986.The text runs as: فتتبعت القرآن أجمعه من العسب واللخاف و صدور الرجال حتى وجدت آخر سورة التوبة مع أبي خزيمة الأنصاري لم أجدها مع أحد غيره

[2] *Bukhârî*, no. 4988. فقدت آية من الأحزاب حين نسخنا المصحف قد كنت أسمع رسول الله يقرأ بها فالتمسناها فوجدناها مع خزيمة بن ثابت الأنصاري

[3] Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

time, then the statement that 'Uthmân canonized only the Madinan Codex is palpably wrong. Again, if 'Uthmân's Committee made a first hand collection by taking the material from the depositories, then it is completely illogical to suggest, as Jeffery does, that 'Uthmân did not take into consideration the "codexes" the different Companions had with them and of the existence of which he could not have been unaware. It is also totally unreasonable to think that while, according to Jeffery, the different provincial metropolitan centres had each one particular codex which it followed, Madina, the centre of the Islamic body politic, depended largely on oral tradition. Jeffery simply misunderstands or misinterprets the fact of the Prophet's having preserved the Qur'ânic texts in both writing and through memorization, and mixes up the information contained in the report about the collection made by 'Abû Bakr with the work of the committee appointed by 'Uthmân and thus attempts to create doubts about the history of the Qur'ân texts.

Thus, coming to the work done under 'Uthmân, Jeffery attempts to explain the existence of a number of "codexes" by saying: "What we find in early Islam, as a matter of fact, is only what we might have expected to find. Different members of the community who were interested began to collect in written form so much as they could gather of the revelation material that had been proclaimed by the Prophet."[2] This statement ignores or sidetracks the fact that the different Companions made their copies of the Qur'ân texts during the life-time of the Prophet and at his dictation or listening to his recitation. The way Jeffery states the case seems to suggest that the different members of the community began to collect the revelation material only after the Prophet was no more. This was not the fact. It may also be asked: If different members of the community who were interested began to collect in written form so much as they could of the revelation material, was it not all the more natural that 'Abû Bakr, the Prophet's closest Companion and immediate successor, would have made a collection of all that he could of the revelation material? That is exactly what he did and that is exactly what Jeffery attempts against all evidence and reason to deny.

After having stated in the above mentioned way the reason for the individual collections of the Qur'ân texts Jeffery states that some of these collections later acquired "notoriety" in different provincial centres. Thus "the people of Homs and Damascus followed the Codex of Miqdâd b. al-Aswad, the Kûfans that of Ibn Mas'ûd, the Basrans that of Abû Mûsâ al-Ash'arî, and the Syrians in general

[1] *Ibid.*, n. 1.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

that of Ubai' ibn Kab."[1] There "were wide divergences between the collections", further says Jeffery, and that 'Uthmân's solution was "no mere matter of removing dialectical peculiarities" but establishing a "standard text for the whole empire" by canonizing the Madinan Codex and suppressing all others. "There can be little doubt that the text canonized by 'Uthmân was only one among several types of text in existence at the time."[2]

It needs to be pointed out that the persons mentioned did not find their way to the different provincial centres on their own accord but were appointed as administrators at those places by the *khalîfas* 'Umar and 'Uthmân, with instructions to teach the people the Qur'ân. The copies of the Qur'ân texts with them were not divergent and "different types of text", as Jeffery asserts. These contained the same texts of the Qur'ân, differing only in respect of completeness and, as later reports suggest, in the order of the *sûrahs*. The persons mentioned were all well-known Qur'ân readers (teachers) and both 'Umar and 'Uthmân, of all persons, were well aware of the existence of copies of Qur'ân texts with them. Had these copies contained divergent and different types of text they would never have been appointed to their respective places for administration and teaching of the Qur'ân. That copies of the master copy prepared by 'Abû Bakr had not been sent out to the provinces was due obviously to the fact that while 'Abû Bakr's *khilâfah* was occupied by the process of pacification of the Arabian peninsula, the periods of 'Umar and 'Uthmân were occupied by the processes of expansion and satbilization. Further, the Qur'ân "readers" were also memorizers of the Qur'ân texts and it was understood that they would mainly teach the Qur'ân orally through recitation. It is well to remember that the whole development took place in a rather surprisingly short period of time. The collection of the whole Qur'ân in one written compilation was made by 'Abû Bakr within a couple of years after the Prophet's death; while copies of this master copy were sent out to the provinces by 'Uthmân within the next eighteen years, i. e., by 30 H. He took this step on receipt of the very first report about variant recitations in the provinces. The differences were dialectical and in the manners of vocalization; and this is what the reporter, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamân, who was sent on a campaign to Adharbyjân and noticed the variations on his return march, stressed in his report to the *khalîfah*.[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[3] Ibn al-Athîr, *Al-Kâmil fî al-Târîkh*, Beirut, 1987, vol. III, p. 8.

All the sources unanimously state that 'Uthmân, on receipt of Ḥudhayfah's report, immediately consulted his principal colleagues, borrowed the master copy of the Qur'ân prepared by 'Abû Bakr and then in the custody of Umm al-Mu'minîn Ḥafṣah, had copies of it made by a committee and sent these copies to the different provinces, with instructions to destroy and put into disuse the extant incomplete and uncorroborated copies.[1] This prompt measure was adopted to preserve the integrity of the Qur'ânic text and to prevent any divergent and extraneous elements being introduced into it. That is why all the surviving Companions of the Prophet, including those who had in their possession their personal "codexes" supported and welcomed 'Uthmân's action.[2] It is to be noted that the committee appointed by 'Uthmân to make copies out of the master copy and to streamline the dialectical aberrations was headed by the same Zayd ibn Thâbit who had made the master copy under 'Abû Bakr and who was now the Chief Justice of Madina. Of the three other members of the committee 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr himself possessed his personal codex. Similarly the holders of other codexes like Miqdâd ibn al-'Aswad, 'Abû Mûsâ al-'Ash'arî, and Ubay ibn Ka'b welcomed and accepted 'Uthmân's measure. Even at Kûfa, where 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd used to teach the Qur'ân, the other Companions of the Prophet welcomed it. It is only 'Abd Allah and some of his followers who initially disliked it, but this immediate and temporary reaction of theirs soon passed away and they also accepted the 'Uthmanic copy. Jeffery mentions this temporary opposition in such a way as to give the impression that it was permanent and persistent. His statement that "the Qurrâ' were violently opposed to 'Uthmân because of this act"[3] is grossly wrong and is not borne out by the sources. While citing Ibn al-Athîr's work in support of his statement about 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd's disagreement Jeffery withholds form his readers the important fact mentioned by Ibn al-Athîr in the same place that while 'Abd Allah's followers gathered round him and voiced their objection he shouted out to them saying: "Be quiet. This has been done under our eyes. And if I were to take over from him what 'Uthmân has taken charge of, I would surely have followed his way (فصاح و قال اسكت فعن ملأ منا فعل ذلك فلو وليت منه ما ولي عثمان لسلكت سبيله)".[4] Jeffery also cites

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[1] *Ibid*; also *Bukhârî*, no. 4987.

[2] Ibn al-Athîr, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

[3] Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 8. In support of this particular statement Jeffery inappropriately mentions in his footnote the Ibâdites' allegation that 'Uthman had tampered with God's word. It may pointed out that neither were the 'Ibâdites the *Qurrâ'* under reference nor can their unjust allegation be construed as "violent opposition".

[4] Ibn al-Athîr, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

Qurṭubî in support of his statement; [1] but Qurṭubî in fact mentions 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd's attitude as his immediate reaction and points out that soon he revised his opinion and accepted the opinion of the other Companions of the Prophet in respect of the wisdom of 'Uthmâns act.[2] Al-Dhahabî also mentions the same thing about 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd and states: "It has been reported that Ibn Mas'ûd agreed and followed 'Uthmân(و قد ورد أن ابن مسعود رضي و تابع عثمان ...).[3] In fact 'Abd Allah soon afterwards returned to Madina, lived in close association with 'Uthmân. and died there in 32/33 H. and was buried in the Baqî' graveyard.[4]

Thus the 'Uthmânic copy, which was in fact the complete authentic copy of the Qur'ân made during 'Abû Bakr's time by taking into consideration all memorized and written texts including those possessed by individual Companions, was accepted by all the surviving Companions of the Prophet. It is obvious, however, that in spite of 'Uthmân's directive to destroy the incomplete and inauthentic codexes, some of these, including that of Ibn Mas'ûd, were not destroyed. Jeffery gathers from Ibn 'Abî Dâud's *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif* and several Qur'ân commentaries the names of 13 "Secondary Codices" of which 7 "are based on the Codex of Ibn Mas'ûd".[5] Be that as it may, the variant readings that he has tabulated from the Qur'ân commentaries and Arabic Lexicographical works and are reported to be derived from the various codices do not, however, prove his thesis that these codices were "divergent", "several" or "rival types of text." All that appears from the list of variants is that they relate to a very small number *'âyahs* in the Qur'ân and are then mostly synonyms or explanatory expressions on the words in the 'Uthmânic text.

The most important question is, however, the authenticity of the reports that ascribe the readings to the various old codices. On this question Jeffery writes: "In some cases it must be confessed there is a suspicion of readings later invented by the grammarians and theologians being fathered on these early authorities in order to gain the prestige of their name. This suspicion is perhaps strongest in the case of distinctively Shî'a readings that are attributed to Ibn Mas'ûd, and in readings attributed to the wives of the Prophet ... On the whole, however, one may feel confident that the majority of readings quoted from any Reader really go

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[1] Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 8, n. 3.

[2] Qurṭubî, *Tafsîr*, X, 7171 (cited in Al-Dhahabî, *Siyar 'A'lâm al-Nublâ'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut and Ḥusayn al-Asad, Vol. I, p. 485, n. 2.

[3] Al-Dhahabî, *op.cit.*, p. 488.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 498-499.

[5] Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

back to early authority." Thus does Jeffery, while recognizing the problem, merely avoids it and disposes of it by saying that "one may feel confident" that the majority of the readings quoted go back to early authority. None can feel so "confident" about it unless he is prejudiced. In any case, serious scholarship demands that each and every report attributing a certain variant reading to a particular authority should be thoroughly looked into and its authenticity or otherwise be ascertained before hazarding a drastic conclusion on the basis of that reading. The fact remains that Jeffery has not done anything of that sort. And in view of the fact that the popular Qur'ân commentaries contain many uncorroborated and inauthentic reports and that many interested groups had readily had recourse to fabrication of reports, the majority of the variant readings listed by Jeffery are suspect and are unworthy of credence.

There are other points related to the question of authenticity of the variant readings; and it would suffice to mention only the points that Jeffery has noted. (a) Occasionally "a reading that is commonly known as coming from a certain early Reader" is "attributed to quite another source."[1] (b) There are cases "where a variant is quoted by only one source which is otherwise known for the carelessness of its citation of authorities."[2] (c) Not "infrequently" there are "various forms of the variant attributed to the same Reader in different sources."[3] (d) "Some of the variants in the form in which they have survived to us seem linguistically impossible..."[4] (e) In "some cases the uncanonical variants from these Old Codices may be interpreted as improvements on the 'Uthmânic text,... In such cases the 'Uthmânic text would seem to be the more primitive text which the other types assume as their basis."[5] (f) There are a number of cases "where the variant in the Old Codices was merely a synonym for the word in the text..."[6] Even with regard to the very slight differences in the lists of *sûrahs* in the different codices as are mentioned in later works Jeffery admits: "It is evident that we cannot place any reliance on the lists, which is as in the case of Ibn Mas'ûd's Codex, must be regarded as later formations not based on the original Codex."[7]

Thus the facts mentioned by Jeffery himself go to show the weakness and untenability of his theory of the "Old Codices" being divergent and "rival types of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

texts." All that is proved is some dialectical peculiarities and differences in vocalization due primarily to the absence of vowel signs and points on or under some letters in the early form of the Arabic alphabet, together with the use of synonyms for a number of words in the 'Uthmânic text. The variant readings from the Old Codices, even if the reports regarding these readings be considered reliable, do not make out a case for rival and divergent texts.[1] Neither did 'Uthmân "canonize" only one of many existing texts, nor did the written copies of Qur'ânic texts possessed by individual Companions of the Prophet – the so-called "Old Codices" – constitute divergent and rival texts.

II. THE BELL- WATT THEORIES

Of the others who have built upon Nöldeke's assumptions mention may specially be made of Richard Bell and his pupil W. Montgomery Watt. Working on the hints given by Nöldeke, Bell made out his own dating and chronological order of the *sûrahs* and passages of the Qur'ân, added further assumptions about the history of the Qur'ân and advanced a theory of "revision" of the Qur'ânic texts by the Prophet. His dating and chronological order were carried out principally in his translation of the Qur'ân which appeared in 1937-1939.[2] The views about the history of the Qur'ân as a whole and the theory of revision were first put forward in a few articles. Subsequently Bell consolidated all these views in his *Introduction to the Qur'ân* which was published in 1853. His pupil Watt used and publicised these views, sometimes with slight modifications, principally in his *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*, published respectively in 1953 and 1956. Next he consolidated his and his mentor's views in a "completely revised and enlarged" edition of Bell's above mentioned work under the title: *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, published in 1970.

So far as Bell's dating and chronological order of the Qur'ânic texts are concerned, these are as conjectural and faulty as Nöldeke's are. In fact no two orientalists are agreed on these matters. Even Bell's pupil Watt does not fully endorse his views in this respect.[3] They will not therefore be further discussed.

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[1] Being aware of the fact that the "readings" tabulated by him constitute what he himself calls "relatively small" material, Jeffery advances the assumption that "only the relatively few readings that had some theological and philological interest" could have been remembered and quoted and that many more could have been suppressed in the interest of orthodoxy." (p. 9). This assumption does in no way help Jeffery's thesis; for the admittedly spurious and suspicious readings that the commentaries quote and Jeffery tabulates far outweigh the supposedly forgotten and suppressed readings.

[2] R. Bell, *The Qur'ân Translated with a critical Rearrangement of the Sûrahs*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1937-1939.

[3] See W. M. Watt, "The dating of the Qur'ân: A Review of Richard Bell's Theories", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1957, pp. 46-56.

The question is also somewhat related to Bell's theory about the "revision" of the Qur'ân by the Prophet. This latter theme relates more appropriately to the text of the Qur'ân. It will therefore be discussed in a subsequent chapter.[1] In this section only the Bell-Watt views about the history of the Qur'ân as a whole will be considered.

Bell and Watt, or rather Watt, takes up from where Arthur Jeffery leaves the story of the collection of the Qur'ân in one compilation. Like the latter, Watt also questions the fact of 'Abû Bakr's having had the Qur'ânic texts collected in one written compilation and attempts to create doubts about the report and advances a number of grounds for it. Thus, first, he says that there are various versions of the report containing many discrepancies. "Thus there is no unanimity about the originator of the idea of collecting the Qur'ân; generally it is said to have been 'Umar, but sometimes 'Abû Bakr is said to have commissioned the 'collection' on his own initiative. On the other hand, there is a tradition which says 'Umar was the first to collect the Qur'ân and completely excludes Abû Bakr."[2]

Now, the discrepancies mentioned about the originator of the idea relate to matters of detail not to the essence of the fact. It is clear from the reports that while some narrators emphasize 'Umar's role in pointing out to 'Abû Bakr the necessity for making the compilation, the others emphasize the fact of 'Abû Bakr's being the *khalîfah* at the time and his having officially commissioned the collection. The version of the report which attributes this work to 'Umar is given by Ibn Sa'd who, while describing 'Umar's qualities and deeds, make a rather casual remark saying: "and he was the first to make a collection of the Qur'ân in the sheets (و هو أول من جمع القرآن في الصحف)."[3] It is noteworthy that nothing is here spoken about how the work was carried out and by whom. As al-Suyûṭî points out, the chain of narrators of this report is broken and the statement can only mean that 'Umar was the first to suggest the making of the Qur'ânic texts in one compilation.[4] In any case, these discrepancies in the different reports do not in any way mutually nullify one another; rather they jointly and severally point to the fact of a collection having been made before the time of 'Uthmân. In fact, the most authentic of these versions very clearly state the role of 'Umar in urging the matter to the *khalîfah* 'Abû Bakr and the latter's having acceded to the suggestion and carried it out.[5] The problem with Watt is that he does not bother to examine

[1] See *infra*, chapter XI.
[2] Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 41.
[3] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqât*, vol. III, Leiden, 1904, p. 202 (Beirut, 1985 edition, p. 281).
[4] Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûṭî, *al-Itqân fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, vol. I, Riyadh, 1987, p. 165.

the authenticity or otherwise of any particular report and uses whatever he thinks favourable to his point of view.

A second argument of Watt's is that "the reason given for the step, namely, the death of a large number of 'readers' in the battle of Yamâma" is not convincing because in the lists of those who fell in that battle "very few are mentioned who were likely to have had much of the Qur'ân by heart. Those killed were mostly recent converts."[2] It must at once be pointed out that this statement of Watt's is totally conjectural and wrong. It is not understandable where he found the information that those killed were mostly recent converts. It is true that the Muslim army was commanded by Khâlid ibn al-Walîd and he was relatively a recent convert; but he did not fall in that battle. Nor was Wahshî, the *mawlâ* of Jubayr ibn Mut'im, who was a recent convert who speared down the apostate leader Musaylama al-Kadhdhâb, killed in that battle. The Muslim army consisted of a large number of *muhâjirs* and *ansâr* and recruits from Makka and other new Muslims. The standard bearers of the *muhâjirs* were successively Abd Allah ibn Ḥafṣ ibn Ghânim, Sâlim (*mawlâ of* 'Abû Ḥudhayfah ibn 'Utbah ibn Rabî'ah), 'Abû Ḥudahyfah and Zayd ibn al-Khattâb (elder brother of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb).[3] All of them were very early Muslims, all of them fell in the battle and all of them more or less memorized the Qur'ân. Particularly Sâlim was known as the best of the Qur'ân "readers" among the *muhâjirs* and used to lead them in prayer.[4] The standard bearer of the *ansâr* was Thâbit ibn Qays ibn Shammâs.[5] He was known as *khaṭîb al-ansâr* (the preacher of the *anṣâr*) and *khaṭîb al-Rasûl* (preacher of the Messenger).[6] He also fell in the battle. Most of the *muhâjirûn* and *anṣâr* who participated in the campaign knew the Qur'ân by heart, in parts or in full. During the battle 'Abû Ḥudhayfah inspired them to fight on by addressing them as: "O possessors of the Qur'ân, decorate the Qur'ân by deeds (يا أهل القرآن زينوا القرآن بالفعال)".[7] The Companions also encouraged one another by addressing them as "O bearers of *sûrat al- Baqarah* (يا أصحاب سورة البقرة)."[8] The brunt of the battle was borne by the *muhâjirs* and *anṣâr* and the Makkan Muslims.[9] Among those who fell in the

[1] See *Bukhârî*, no. 4968.
[2] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc.*, op. cit., p. 41.
[3] Al-Ṭabarî, *Târîkh*, vol. II, Berut , 1987, p. 280.
[4] *Bukhârî*, nos. 292, 1140, 7175; *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. VI, p. 165 (no.25320), al-Dhahabî, *Siyar* , I, p. 168
[5] Al-Ṭabarî, *Târîkh*, vol. II, Beirut, 1987, p. 278.
[6] Ibn al-Athîr, *Usd al-Ghâbah*, vol. I., p. 239.
[7] Al-Ṭabarî, *op. cit.*, p. 280; Ibn Kathîr, *Al-Bidâyah wa al-Nihâyah*, vol. III, Beirut, 1987, p. 329; In al-Athîr, *Al-Kâmil Fî al-Târîkh*, ed. Abû al-Fidâ' 'Abd Allah al-Qâdî, vol. II, Beirut, 1987, p. 221.
[8] Ibn Kathîr, *op. cit.*, p. 329.
[9] Al-Ṭabarî, *op. cit.*, p. 281 (ان المصيبة كانت في المهاجرين والأنصار أكثر منها في أهل البادية); Ibn al-Athîr, *op. cit.*, p. 221 (القتل كان في المهاجرين)

battle were many prominent Companions of the Prophet (سادات الصحابة).[1] Ibn al-Athîr gives a list of some 38 Companions of the Prophet who fell in the battle of Yamâma.[2] According to Al-Ṭabarî, 360 of the *muhâjirs* and *anṣâr* residents of Madina, and 300 each of the *muhajirs* not residing in Madina and the new Muslims (*tâbi'ûn*) fell in the battle.[3] Nothing could be farther from the truth than Watt's statement that those who fell in the battle were mostly "recent converts" and that of those who fell "very few are mentioned who were likely to have had much of the Qur'ân by heart."

A third plea of Watt's is that "much of the Qur'ân was already written in some form or other, so that the death of some of those who could recite it from memory need not have given rise to the fear that part of the Qur'ân would be lost."[4] Not only "much of the Qur'ân" but the whole of it was indeed written down and the whole of it was also preserved in memory; but neither were the written texts collected in one compilation nor could the memorizers be dispensed with because the texts were written down. As Watt himself recognises, the written text was only consonantal, there being no vowel signs and a number of consonants were still without their distinguishing dots. Hence the proper recitation of the Qur'ân needed the expertise of those who had committed it to memory and learnt to recite it from the mouth of the Prophet himself. The death of a number of Qur'ân "readers" at the battle of Yamâma was thus naturally a cause of concern for those who were at the helm of affairs and it turned their attention to the immediate task of having the written texts collected in one compilation.

Watt's next argument, which he thinks to be "the weightiest criticism of the tradition", is that if there had been "an official codex" made by 'Abû Bakr, the other "collections" of the Qur'ân could not have become "authoritative" in the different provinces and the disputes that led to 'Uthmân's "recension" would not have arisen, for "reference could have been made" to it.[5] In thus arguing Watt either overlooks or tendentially shapes a number of facts. First, the collection made under 'Abû Bakr was meant for preservation of the written text in one

(والأنصارأكثر منهم في البوادي و أهل القرى).

1 Ibn Kathîr, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

2 Ibn al-Athîr, *op.cit.*, pp. 223-224.

3 Al-Tabarî, *op. cit.*, p. 283 (و قد قتل من المهاجرين و الأنصار من أهل قصبة المدينة يومئذ ثلاثمائة و ستون ... ومن المهاجرين من غير أهل المدينة والتابعين باحسان ثلاثمائة من هؤلاء وثلاثمائة من هؤلاء).

4 Watt.s, *Bell's Introduction etc.*, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

5 *Ibid.*

compilation. His *khilâfah* was mainly occupied by the task of pacification of the Arabian peninsula. The "provinces" where the so-called other "collections" are said to have become authoritative had not yet come into existence so that there was no question of sending out copies of that collection to the provinces. It was during the *khilâfah* of 'Umar that the first phase of conquest and expansion took place and the Provinces came into existence. Secondly, the so-called other "collections" of the Qur'ân were not at all different types of texts but written copies more or less complete of the same Qur'ânic texts made by individual Companions of the Prophet who were now posted in the provinces in different official capacities and who were also in charge of teaching the Qur'ân to the people of their respective jurisdictions. Thirdly, the "disputes" that arose during the *khilâfah* of 'Uthmân, 'Umar's successor, related not to the differences in the types of texts but to those of "recitations" due to dialectical differences of the tribes and peoples involved. And as soon as such differences in "recitations" were first noticed steps were taken to sort out the dialectical differences and to send out copies of the compilation made by 'Abû Bakr. That is exactly what 'Uthmân did. It is of utmost importance to remember that the whole development took place within less than twenty years after the Prophet's death. It is a highly misleading statement and a gross tendential shaping of the facts that because different "collections" of the Qur'ân. i. e., the written copies with individual Companions, had become "authoritative" in the provinces there could not have been any previously made "official copy" of the Qur'ân.

Watt's confusion is evident from his next argument. He writes: "Again, the way in which 'Umar himself is represented elsewhere in insisting that the verse of stoning was in the Qur'ân, is hardly consistent with his having in his possession an official collection."[1] Here Watt wrongly assumes that 'Umar made the reported insistence on the so-called verse of stoning during his own *khilâfah*. This was by no means the case. Had 'Umar made such insistence while he was the *khalîfah*, none could have possibly prevented him from including the alleged verse in the Qur'ân. It has also been pointed out before that Ibn Sa'd's statement that 'Umar was the first to make a collection of the Qur'ân refers only to his initiative in the matter during the time of 'Abû Bakr. On the other hand, it needs no pointing out that 'Umar could not have so spoken about the verse of stoning during 'Uthmân's time for the latter succeeded him only after his death. As the report

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[1] *Ibid.*

to the subject clearly states, 'Umar spoke about the so-called verse of stoning at the time of making the collection during the time of 'Abû Bakr, but it was rejected for lack of any supportive evidence either from the memorizers or from the written copies of the Qur'ânic texts.[1] And as Watt himself admits a little afterwards, this alleged verse was not and could not have been in the Qur'ân.[2] Thus the very report about 'Umar's speaking about the alleged verse of stoning which Watt cites goes to show that the collection of the Qur'ân in one compilation was made during the time of 'Abû Bakr. Watt also misses the point that nothing was accepted and included in the compilation unless it was supported by a corroborative evidence, which meant the comparison of the written texts with the memorized ones, and vice versa.

"Lastly", argues Watt, if "Zayd's collection [i. e., under Abû Bakr] was an official one, ... it is hardly possible that it would pass out of official keeping, even into the hands of the caliph's daughter [Ḥafṣah]."[3] Clearly Watt here completely disregards the circumstances of the time. The system of archives or official depository of records had not yet been developed. 'Abû Bakr had made over the Qur'ân compilation to 'Umar because the latter was nominated as successor by him. 'Umar handed it over to Hafsah not simply because she was his daughter but also because she was the Prophet's wife and because he ('Umar) had not nominated his successor but had left the matter of succession to be decided by a Council of six senior Companions of the Prophet.

Thus the grounds on which Watt questions the authenticity of the report concerning the collection of the Qur'ân in one compilation under 'Abû Bakr are all unreasonable and untenable. Watt makes this wrong and untenable assumption, however, to suggest that it was 'Uthmân under whom the first hand collection of the Qur'ân was made. Hence in winding up his discussion on the report about the collection under 'Abû Bakr Watt states that this "traditional account" was "doubtless gradually elaborated to avoid the awkward fact that the first 'collection' of the Qur'ân was made by 'Uthmân, who was greatly disliked."[4] When did this supposed gradual elaboration of the account take place and who were instrumental in doing this are not indicated by Watt. He clearly fixes his attention on the temporary dislike and discontent which led to the end of 'Uthmân's *khilâfah*; but he does not take into account the fact that 'Uthmân's own

[1] Al-Syûṭî, *al-Itqân etc., op. cit.*, p. 167.
[2] *Idid.*, p. 55.
[3] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.*, p. 41.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

kinsmen and supporters came to power shortly after his death and remained in power for more than a century. So the supposed distortion of the fact could not have taken place during their rule. Nor were the 'Abbâsids, who succeeded the Umayyads in power, likely to fabricate any account in favour of 'Abû Bakr, for that would not in any way go to the credit of their dynasty. In fact the supposed "gradual elaboration of the account" is Watt's another unreasonable assumption.

This is further clear from his treatment of the account of the "collection" under 'Uthmân. Here Watt is confronted with two hard facts, namely, (a) 'Uthmân's having borrowed the "collection" in Ḥafṣah's custody for the purpose of making copies out of it and (b) his having returned that copy to her when the work of copying was finished. These two facts run counter to any suggestion that 'Uthmân carried out a first hand collection of the Qur'ân. Hence Watt suggests that Ḥafṣah's copy was her personal copy and was in no way an "official collection".[1] Next he cites the report given in Ibn Abî Dâud's *Kitâb al-maṣâḥif* which says that Marwân ibn Hakam, while governor of Medina, had Ḥafṣah's *ṣuḥuf* (sheets) destroyed on the ground that any unusual reading in it might lead to further dissension, and says that this implies that her copy "was unsuitable as a basis for the official text. ... It is perhaps specially mentioned to link up this account with that of the first 'collection' under Abû Bakr." Watt further observes that it was unlikely that Ḥafṣah's copy was of primary importance, that it could not have "contained more than what had been arranged in the 'book' by Muḥammad at the time of his death" and could "hardly have been the sole or main basis of the 'Uthmânic text."[2]

This latter statement is Watt's repetition of his mentor Bell's equally arbitrary assumption that the Prophet had left a collection of written materials, partly "revised" and partly "unrevised", which he intended to give as the "book" to his followers but which he could not accomplish because of his sudden death.[3] This assumption of Bell's and his theory of revision will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. It is interesting to note, however, that earlier Watt alludes to this assumption of Bell's in order to suggest that there was really no need for 'Abû Bakr's making a collection of the Qur'ân.[4] And here Watt brings in the same assumption to suggest that 'Uthmân made a first hand collection of the Qur'ân. But leaving aside this inconsistency on Watt's part, it needs to be pointed out that

[1] *Ibid*, p. 43.
[2] *Ibid.* See also Ibn Abî Dâûd, *Kitab al-Maṣâḥif*, Beirut reprint, 1985, p. 28.
[3] See *supra*, p.
[4] Watt, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

the reported destruction of Hafsah's "sheets" by Marwân does not really prove that her copy could not be the basis of the copies made by 'Uthmân's Commissioners; for, while copying from her copy they were at the same time instructed to streamline any dialectical variation that might be encountered. In ordering the destruction of her copy Marwân appears to have had in view the possibility of any variant reading that might be based on her copy. For one thing, when everything is considered, there still remain two important questions unanswered: (a) why did 'Uthmân himself not cause Ḥafṣah's copy to be destroyed while the other "codexes" at Madina were destroyed? And (b) why is there no mention of 'Uthmân's having made use of the other extant codexes, of which he and the commissioners he appointed for the purpose were quite aware, in making his "official collection"? The obvious replies to these questions are that he did not destroy the copy of Ḥafṣah because he had borrowed it from her on a promise to return it to her; and that he did not use the other extant codexes because they were considered superfluous in view of the existence of the compilation with Ḥafṣah which had been made during the time of 'Abû Bakr after taking into consideration all the written and memorized texts.

Watt in effect proceeds on two unwarranted and untenable assumptions. Thus he says, first, that the tradition about 'Abû Bakr's collection was fabricated to avoid giving the credit of the work to 'Uthmân and then, regarding the report of the work done by the latter, he again says that it was so manipulated as to link it up with the first collection under 'Abû Bakr. In fact Watt distorts both the reports in order to sustain his further assumption that it was 'Uthmân who made a first hand collection of the Qur'ân. Hence Watt finally asserts: "there is no reason now for rejecting two points in the traditional account: (1) the commissioners were to collect all the pieces of revelation they could find; (2) where men had remembered it with dialectical variations of the literary language, they were to make the Meccan forms standard."[1] It must at once be pointed out that Watt here grossly misstates the facts. The "traditional account" does not at all say that the commissioners' duty was to make a first hand compilation by collecting "all the pieces of revelation they could find." It very clearly says that the Commissioners were to make copies out of the copy with Ḥafṣah and to streamline any variations in the reading that might be encountered. It is also not quite correct to say that they were asked to standardize what "men had

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

remembered" with dialectical variations. This latter statement emanates from Watt's (and others') misunderstanding of the whole process of making the first hand collection which he thinks was done partly out of written copies and partly out of memorized texts.[1] As already pointed out, the first hand collection under 'Abû Bakr was made on a careful comparison of the written texts with the memorized ones and vice versa, or on the basis of two independent witnesses for each piece of text.[2] Such ought to have been the case; for, as the work was commissioned by the state, no person or persons appointed for the purpose could reasonably have been instructed to accept and incorporate into the compilation whatever anyone came up with a written or memorized text. On the whole Watt's assumption that 'Uthmân made a first hand collection and compilation of the Qur'ânic texts is untenable and incorrect. In as much, however, as he makes this assumption he in effect counters Jeffery's thesis that 'Uthmân simply standardized one of a number of rival and different types of texts.

This is all the more clear from Watt's assessment of the so-called "pre-Uthmânic codices" and the variant readings reportedly contained in those codices and collected by Jeffery. Speaking about these variant readings Watt rightly observes: these varaint readings "chiefly affect the vowels and punctuation, but occasionally there is a different consonantal text... The names of the suras, too, are mostly the same."[3] As already pointed out, the reported variations in consonantal text are merely synonyms or explanatory expressions for the words in the Qur'ân. Speaking particularly about the two most well-known codices of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ûd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b Watt observes that while the former's codex omits the last two *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân and also probably the first *sûrah* (*al-Fâtiḥah*), that of Ubayy ibn Ka'b includes not only these three *surahs* but also two other short *sûrahs*. "Short as the text" of these two pieces is, observes Watt, "there are a number of points where the linguistic usage is not paralleled in the Qur'ân." They might have been used by Muslims as prayers during the Prophet's time, "but they cannot have been part of the Qur'ân." "Thus on the whole", concludes Watt, "the information which has reached us about the pre-'Uthmânic codices suggests that there was no great variation in the actual contents of the Qur'ân in the period immediately after the Prophet's death."[4]

[1] *Ibid.* p. 40.
[2] *Supra*, p.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[4] *Ibid.*

III. JOHN BURTON'S *COLLECTION OF THE QUR'ÂN*

The other work which may be considered in this connection is John Burton's *The Collection of the Qur'ân* which appeared in 1977.[1] He builds upon the suggestions and assumptions of his predecessors, mainly the Goldziher-Schacht assumption that the reports and *hadîth* literature in general are fabrications of later generations of Muslims in the second and third Islamic century and the Bell-Watt assumptions that the Prophet had made a "collection" of the revelations, some revised and some unrevised, and that the reports about the collection of the Qur'ân are manipulated in order to give 'Abû Bakr and 'Umar the main credit and to 'Uthmân a subsidiary role. With these assumptions Burton blends his own theory of *naskh* (abrogation). He says that the Prophet himself had compiled the Qur'ân. Later Muslim jurists, however, forged the concept of *naskh* in order to justify certain *fiqh* positions. They forged certain "verses" in support of their views and held that these verses once formed part of the Qur'ân but were abrogated. In order to justify this theory they also claimed that the Prophet could not have compiled the Qur'ân in his lifetime because *naskh* of any *'âyah* could occur at any time as long as he lived; and since he could not have compiled the Qur'ân, it must have been done by his Companions. Hence arose the "forged" narrations about the compilation of the Qur'ân. Initially, the role was given to 'Uthmân; but as he became unpopular, the credit of initial compilation was given to Abû Bakr and 'Umar and a lesser role was assigned to 'Uthmân.[2] This motive of proving the validity of *naskh*, emphasizes Burton, "induced the Muslims to exclude their Prophet from the history of the collection of their Qur'ân text. It was a compelling motive. It was their only motive."[3]

It is of course a fact that some later Muslims writers state that the Qur'ân could not have been compiled during the Prophet's lifetime because *naskh* could take place at any time during his life.[4] But it is very important to note that this statement is neither the Prophet's nor that of his Companions. It is merely the opinion of such writers who intend to justify the compilation of the Qur'ân after the Prophet's death, not to suppress the fact of his having compiled the Qur'ân nor to sustain the theory of *naskh*. It is not necessary to discuss here the concept of *naskh*.[5] It would suffice only to point out that whatever might be the

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[1] Published by the Cambridge University Press.

[2] J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân*, pp. 230-234.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[4] See Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân etc.*, vol. I., p.

[5] There is indeed a vast literature on the subject. See for a concise and useful discussion Ibn al-Jawzî, *Nawâsikh al-Qur'ân*,

implications and meanings attached to it in later times, the concept has its root in the Qur'ân itself.[2] It thus really betrays a lack of knowledge of the Qur'ân to make such a bold assertion that the theory of *naskh* was forged by later Muslim jurists.

Burton indeed makes a series of four specific forgery allegations against an unidentified body of Muslim jurists and traditionists. He says (a) that they forged the concept of *naskh*; (b) they forged a number of "verses" to sustain their theory; (c) they suppressed the fact of the Prophet's having himself made a compilation of the Qur'ân and (d) they forged the reports regarding the compilation of the Qur'ân by 'Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân. He advances no specific evidence in support of any of these allegations. His main or rather sole prop is the Goldziher-Schacht assumption about the "traditions" and he explicitly states that he re-examines the Muslim accounts of the collection of the Qur'ân "in the light of the studies by Goldziher and Schacht."[3] It needs to be pointed out that the Goldziher-Schacht assumptions are by no means unassailable; rather they are wrong and untenable.[4] But leaving aside that premise of Burton's, his theories and assumptions are untenable on the grounds of simple reason and common sense.

Thus first, even if it is assumed for argument's sake that the jurists forged the theory of *naskh* in order to justify certain *fiqh* positions, there was no need to link this theory of *naskh* with the process of collection and compilation of the Qur'ânic text. For they all hold that whatever *naskh* (abrogation) was there it all happened during the lifetime of the Prophet. Also the most that they held was that certain verses supporting their *fiqh* positions were originally in the Qur'ân but were subsequently abrogated in respect of the reading of the abrogated text but not in respect of its rule (*ḥukm*). They also held and believed that nothing could be added to or detracted from the Qur'ân after the Prophet's death. Thus, whether the Prophet himself collected all the Qur'ânic texts in one compilation or some of his Companions did it after his death is totally immaterial and irrelevant to the theory of *naskh*. None of the protagonists of the theory of *naskh* ever suggested that such and such verse was originally in the Qur'ân but was dropped by the subsequent compiler. Such a suggestion, besides being subversive of the integrity of the Qur'ân, would render the theory of *naskh* simply superfluous.

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[1] There is indeed a vast literature on the subject. See for a concise and useful discusion Ibn al-Jawzî, *Nawâsikh al-Qur'ân*, ed. Muhammad Ashraf 'Alî al-Malabârî, Madina Islamic University, 1404/1984.

[2] See the Qur'ân, 2:106.

[3] Burton, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

[4] See *infra*, pp. 245ff. for discussion on the Godziher-Schacht assumptions about *hadîth* literature.

Secondly, not all the fiqh rules are directly based on the Qur'ân. Many of them are indeed derived from *sunnah*, i. e., the Prophet's instructions and practices. There is also a theory that some *sunnah* ruling overrides the Qur'ânic prescriptions in specific cases. The jurists who are supposed to have been confronted with the alleged *fiqh* positions could have had their way by simply forging a *ḥadîth* regarding their specific requirement instead of going through the labyrinthian process of forging the alleged verses of the Qur'ân, then forging the story that those verses had been abrogated and finally forging the story of the collection of the Qur'ân and suppressing the fact of the Prophet's having already done so. Burton's theory assumes a net-work of forgery operating through a succession of generations in an environment devoid of any dissident groups and differing views. The well-known course of Islamic history does not admit of the existence of such an absurd situation.

Thirdly, Burton's (or rather Watt's) theory requires us to believe that the credit for the collection of the Qur'ân was first given to 'Uthmân. It does not explain why, if the protagonists of *naskh* invented the story by suppressing the Prophet's role in the matter, why should they have chosen 'Uthmân, the third successor of the Prophet, for their story instead of his immediate successor 'Abû Bakr? After all, it could not have any imaginable bearing on their purpose to select the third instead of the first and immediate successor of the Prophet. The question indeed involves a look into the special occasion and circumstance for the attribution of the work either to 'Abû Bakr or to 'Uthmân. It would then appear that the special circumstance during 'Abû Bakr's time was an apprehension about the probability of loss of any part of the Qur'ân due to the death of a large number of the Companions and Qur'ân "bearers" (either memorizers or possessors of written texts)[1] giving rise to the need for having the Qur'ânic texts collected in one written compilation; while the special circumstance of 'Uthmân's time was the emergence of variant readings due to a lack of circulation of an authentic and complete copy of the Qur'ân in the far-flung provinces which had not come into existence during 'Abû Bakr's time. Thus both 'Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân responded respectively to the special circumstances of their times and both did equally meritorious and praiseworthy deeds, the one having the Qur'ânic texts collected in one written compilation, and other having made authentic copies by streamlining dialectical variations, sending out these copies to the different

[1] It may be recalled here that Sâlim (*mawlâ* of 'Abû Ḥudhayfah), the standard bearer of the *muhâjirûn* at the battle of Yamâma who died in that battle was both a Qur'ân memorizer and possessor of a "codex" of the Qur'ânic texts.

provinces and withdrawing and suppressing the unauthorised and unchecked codices. What they both did was just in the fitness of things and the reports that speak about their respective roles do indeed record the facts. In a way, 'Uthmân's work was bolder, more hazardous and productive of more far-reaching and abiding consequences and, therefore, it is equally if not more worthy of praise and appreciation. 'Uthmân did indeed become unpopular for some of his administrative acts and he ultimately fell a victim to that unpopularity. But his work relating to the Qur'ân was appreciated equally by his friends and foes and it was never made a point of stigma on him by his adversaries. The fiction of his work in respect of the Qur'ân being of "secondary" importance is an invention of the orientalists like Watt and Burton who use it to bolster up their unreasonable and untenable theories.

CHAPTER X
ON THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'ÂN: II. REVISIONISM AT ITS CLIMAX

I. On Revisionism in General

It may be recalled that starting with the mid-nineteenth century orientalists like A. Sprenger and William Muir down to the present time almost all the orientalists treat the sources of Islamic history with unconcealed skepticism. Specially they consider the reports (traditions/*ḥadîth*) as motivated and partial and accept or reject these arbitrarily as they suit their purpose. This tendency to interpret Islamic history according to what the orientalists think to be correct may be termed revisionism. But it applies more specifically to the approach of a group of orientalists who have of late come forward with the view that the Qur'ân came into being much later, in the second century of Islam. They do so by casting doubts on the sources of early Islamic history as a whole and by a number of other assumptions. They explicitly or implicitly rely mainly on the assumptions about *ḥadîth* literature advanced by Ignaz Goldziher, a nineteenth century scholar of Hungarian Jewish origin, and the mid-twentieth century German Jewish scholar Joseph Schacht.

Goldziher attempted to show that *ḥadîth* literature came into existence at the earliest in the second century of Islam, and that the *isnâd* system in it is not reliable and that most of the reports, if not all, are fabrications brought into existence by party, political, dogmatic, juristic and ideological exigencies of the second/third century of Islam.[1] Such views and assumptions have been carried to an extreme by J. Schacht in his *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* published in 1950. Besides complementing and supporting his predecessors' views Schacht advanced two novel suggestions, namely, (a) that Islamic Law falls outside the scope of the "religion" of Islam so that the Qur'ân might virtually be ignored as a source of Islamic jurisprudence and (b) that even the apparently historical *hadîth* was not free from suspicion because, as he says, this too was formulated on juristic considerations.

These views have been rightly criticised and rejected as untenable not only by Muslim scholars [2] but even by the generality of the orientalists themselves. The

[1] Ignaz Goldziher, *Mohamedanische Studien* (first published 1890), Vo.II, tr. into English by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern under title *Muslim Studies*, Vol.II, London, 1971. See also A. Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam : An Introduction to the Study of Hadith Literature*, Oxford, 1924.

[2] See for instance M. M. Al-A'ẓamî, *Studies in Early Ḥadîth Literature*, Beirut, 1968, Chaps. VI,VII; Moḥsin 'Abd al-Nâẓir, *Dirâsât Goldziher Fî al-Sunnah wa Makânatuhâ al-'Ilmiyyah* (Arabic text), unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tunis, 1404/1984; and M. Luqman Salafi, *Naqd al-Ḥadîth 'inda al-Muḥaddithîn Sanadan wa Matanan wa Daḥḍ Mazâ'im al-Musashriqîn*,

views and assumptions of Schacht have been specially dealt with by M. M. Al-A'ẓamî in his *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence.*[1] It has been shown that Schacht's views about *isnâd* are wrong and that his assumption regarding the "Living Tradition" and its having been projected back onto the Prophet are unfounded. A'ẓamî has referred to the specific juridical activities of the Prophet as well as to the first century Islamic legal literature and has shown that Schacht is wrong in thinking that law in the first century of Islam was not based on the Qur'ân and the *sunnah.* Taking Schacht on his own grounds and quoting in extenso the very texts and authorities cited by him, it has been demonstrated that in each case Schacht has taken his argument out of context, has misunderstood or misinterpreted the texts and has otherwise advanced conclusions not substantiated by the authorities he has adduced in their support. Further, it has been shown that in forming his opinions about such jurisconsults as Imâm Mâlik, Schacht has relied not on their own writings but on what their contemporaries or near-contemporaries have said about them.

Of the orientalists themselves who do not accept Schacht's extreme conclusions mention may specially be made of N. J. Coulson who points out that when Schacht's thesis "is systematically developed to the extent of holding that the evidence of legal traditions carries us back to about the year A.H. 100 only; and when the authenticity of every alleged ruling of the Prophet is denied, a void is assumed, or rather created, in the picture of the development of law in early Muslim society. From a practical standpoint, and taking the attendant circumstances into consideration, the notion of such a vacuum is difficult to accept."[2] The position taken in this respect by the orientalists in general is best summed up by Montgomery Watt, who is otherwise in no way friendly to the Prophet of Islam and the Qur'ân. He says: "What in fact Western biographers[of the Prophet] have done is to assume the truth of the broad outlines of the picture.... given by the *sîrah*, and to use this as the framework into which to fit as much Qur'ânic material as possible. The sounder methodology is to regard the Qur'ân and the early traditional accounts as complementary sources...."[3]

Riyadh, 1984.

[1] Published by the King Saud University, Riyadh and John Willy and Sons, Inc, New York, 1985. See also Abû Zahra, "An analytical study of Dr. Schacht's Illusions", *Journal of Islamic Studies*,Cairo, vol. I., no. 1, 1968, pp. 24-44.

[2] N.J. COULSON, *A History of Islamic Law*, London, 1964,pp. 64-65. See also his "European criticism of Hadîth Literature" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 317-321.

[3] W. M. WATT, *M. at M*, XV. See also his "The materials used by Ibn Isḥâq" in BERNARD LEWIS & P.M. HOLT (eds.), *Historians of the Midle East*, London, 1962, pp. 23-24.

Still more notable is the remarks of Maxime Rodinson, a Marxist Jew. Writing about the *ḥadîth* and early *sîrah* literature as source materials he observes:

"An interval of a hundred years is not excessive for the collective memory of a society such as that formed by early Arab Islam. An Arab tribe of the Sudan transmits orally (even today) historical traditions and poetry, the oldest of which are attributed to an important tribal ancestor who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century and whose existence is attested by texts. It ought to be pointed out here that in ideological movements the question of origins is a matter of great interest during times of expansion. In my childhood and adolescence I personally knew Charles Rappoport who in his own youth had visited Friedrich Engels. Both of us had a considerable number of books on the biography of this latter (born, it should be noted, in 1820); otherwise I would undoubtedly have questioned my informer avidly on the life of one of the founders of Marxism. If I had done so I would now be in a position of informing those younger than myself regarding events going back to 1840."[1]

One might add that if he had done so, he would simply have acted as the *tâbi'ûn*, the generation younger than the Companions of the Prophet, had done. In two notes to the above observations Rodinson further states that similar conclusions on the fundamental authenticity of the *sîrah* literature are made by R. Paret, while J. W. Fueck goes further in his rejection of the theses of Schacht, criticising even his conception of the development of juridical tradition. Rodinson also mentions that the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow lately "published a volume with a French edition (*Souvenirs sur Marx et Engles*, Moscow, n. d., the Russian edition dated 1956) where one finds, for example (pp. 344-353), some recollections of Engles published in 1927 by Alexe Voden who died only in 1939. Engles had related to him some details of the period from 1840 to 1848 of his life and that of Marx." Also, Franzisca Kugelmann's recollections on Marx based on the latter's reminiscing about his childhood and the accounts of his parents were put into writing only in 1928. " We might call that", observes Rodinson, " a family *isnâd* ... highly suspect according to Schacht."[2]

Notwithstanding such criticisms and general rejection of the Goldzihet-Schacht fallacies, some orientalists thought it fit not only to relapse into them but even to inflate them out of proportion in an attempt to obliterate the whole course of the history of Islam and the existence of the Qur'ân during the first two centuries. In fact, the revisionists' philosophy is geared to the needs

[1] Maxime Rodinson, "A Critical Survey of Modern Studies on Muhammad", in Merlin Swartz *(ed.), Studies in Islam,* Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 44.

[2] *Ibid.*, notes 123 and 124 at pp. 75-76.

and objects of the modern Jewish society and it is tersely spelt out by one of their exponents, Professor and Rabbi Hertzberg. He says that "modernity" for the Jews "meant a going beyond into some wider category of being, within which past narrowness, and especially the discreet life and practices of the Jewish community, are ended .... I suspect that for Jews modernity begins with the idea, whether conscious or unconscious that if you can destroy the medieval past of Europe, then Jews and non-Jews will begin all over again, on an equal footing."[1]

This objective of being integrated into the wider society underlies the extension of Hertzberg's suggestion to "destroy the medieval past" in the case of the Middle East.

II. J. WANSBOROUGH'S FALLACIES

The lead in this respect was given by J. Wansborough who gave vent to his views in two works published in quick succession, namely, *Qur'ânic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (1978). By employing what is called the "instruments and techniques" of biblical criticism such as "form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism", etc., Wansborough hypothesizes in these works:

(a) That different parts of the Qur'ân originated in different communities located not in Arabia but in Iraq or Syria and that these evolved only gradually from originally independent prophetical traditions ("prophetical logia") during a long period of oral transmission, assuming their final and "canonical" form in the late second/eighth century.

(b) That the texts that were given scriptural status were only a small part of the vast body of traditions and the rest of these became instead the staff of *ḥadîth.*[2]

(c) That this development took place in a "sectarian milieu" in which Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and the Believers hurled ideas and claims against one another until these groups had clearly delineated their confessional, theological and ritual boundaries.

(d) That this "canonization" of the Qur'ânic text was linked with the rise of Classical Arabic and its grammar and the appearance of the Qur'ânic commentaries;

(e) That the "polemical character" of much of the Qur'ân suggests that an important Jewish opposition served as one of the motivations behind its "canonization";

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[1] Hertzberg, *Great Confrontations in Jewish History,* p. 131, Quoted by M. M. al-A'ẓamî, *Impact International,* op. cit, p. 28.

[2] J. Wansborough, *Qur'ânic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation,* Oxford, 1077, p. 44.

(f) That the Islamic tradition is an example of what is known to biblical scholars as 'salvation history': "a theologically and evangelically motivated story of a religion's origins invented late in the day and projected back in time;" the whole process being similar to that of the canonization of the Hebrew scripture;[1]

(g) That "the reason that no Islamic source material from the first century or so of Islam has survived... is that it never existed"; nor can most Muslim traditions be confirmed by contemporary non-Muslim sources. Taking Schacht as his authority Wansborough further states that the Qur'ânic text did not serve as a basis for Muslim law before the ninth century.[2]

Simultaneously with the appearance of Wansborough's works, there appeared another highly controversial work prepared on similar lines by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook under the title: *Hagarism: The making of the Islamic World* (1977). Crone and Cook admit that that they "did not say much about the Koran in *Hagarism* that was not based on Wansborough".[3] The views contained in this latter work do not therefore require separate treatment.

Wansborough's conclusions are clearly and admittedly an inflation of the untenable Goldziher-Schacht assumptions and they immediately elicited sharp criticisms even by most of the orientalists themselves, some of whom describe his work as "drastically wrongheaded", "ferociously opaque" and a "colossal self-deception".[4] In fact it is simply a high-sounding nonsense. His "awkward prose style, diffuse organization" and "confused presentation", observes F. M. Donner, "makes grasping even his basic points all the more difficult."[5] Wansborough relies on a series of assumptions and suggestions rather than on straight arguments; and these may best be refuted by general arguments.

First, he is clearly swayed by what he knows of the evolution and redaction of the text of the Bible and proceeds to project that situation on to the Qur'ân; but he clearly fails to note a very important fact. The history of the redaction of the Bible illustrates that a religious scripture, unlike an ordinary compilation, is always launched not surreptitiously by isolated and scheming individuals but by a recognized body such as a council, a synod or similar authorities. It is invariably a

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 45

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[3] Quoted in Toby Lester, "What is the Koran", *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999, p. 55.

[4] *Ibid.* See also the review of *Qur'ânic Studies* by Paret in *Der Islam*, vol. 55 (1978), p. 354; by van Ess in *Bibliotheca Orientalia*, vol. 35 (1978), p. 350; by Graham in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 100 (1980), p. 138; and of the *Sectarian Milieu* by Madelung in *Der Islam*, vol. 57 (1980), pp. 354-355; and by van Ess in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 43 (1980), pp. 137-139.

[5] Frederick M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins The beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, 1998, p. 38.

momentous public event which cannot escape notice in the chronicles of the time. Wansborough and his disciples do not and cannot point to any such event showing the gradual evolution or redaction of the Qur'ân. As Donner points out: Wansborough "nowhere suggests *who* was responsible for deciding what did, or did not, belong to the Qur'ânic canon. To pin the responsibility for such a process simply on 'the community' or 'scholars' is too vague; we need to have some idea of what individuals, or at least what groups, were involved in making such decisions; and what interests they represented; yet Wansborough remains silent on this question."[1]

Second, if the Qur'ân "evolved only gradually in the seventh and eighth centuries, during a long period of oral transmission", as Wansborough suggests, and if the Islamic tradition, like the Christian "salvation history", was a "theologically and evangelically motivated story" invented "late in the day and projected back in time", such a process would have found mention in some form or other in the historical accounts of the time that have come down to us and of the existence of which Wansborough and his co-thinkers do not deny. It can by no means be imagined that the Muslim historians and traditionists of the seventh and eighth centuries all colluded to suppress the alleged gradual evolution of the Qur'ân during their own time and united to invent an "evangelically motivated story" of their religion's origin and projected it back in time. By the eighth century the Muslim scholars and theologians themselves were divided into various groups and sects and, as the orientalists themselves mention, the *Mu'tazilites*, among others, were debating various theological issues including the nature of the Qur'ân as the "uncreated Word of God". Yet none of these divergent groups allude even indirectly to such a thing as the gradual evolution of the Qur'ân or its redaction during their own or the immediately preceding decades. Also, we do not have to depend about the determination of this fact solely on the Muslim sources. Since the very time of the Prophet and before the end of the seventh century the Muslims came in hostile as well as peaceful relationships with the Persian and Byzantine powers; and Christian and Jewish scholars were holding debates and discussions with their Muslim counterparts about Islam and the Qur'ân. Yet, there is no allusion whatsoever in the Greek, Byzantine or other non-Muslim sources of these two centuries to the alleged gradual evolution or redaction of the Qur'ân during that period.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

Third, Wansborough does not explain how the eventually canonized Qur'ânic text was in the late second century of Islam "imposed on people from Spain to Central Asia who may have been using somewhat different texts for a long time, and why no echo of this presumed operation – which, one imagines, would have aroused sharp opposition – is to be found in our sources."[1] As M. M. al-A'ẓamî points out, the worst absurdity of Wansborough's theory is that it implies that "the Muslims came first and the Qur'ân followed later."[2]

Fourth, in saying that the Qur'ânic text was formulated out of a vast body of "oral traditions" Wansborough fails to notice that the Qur'ân differs very distinctively in diction and literary style from those of the *ḥadîth* literature. In fact it differs in literary form and style from any writing in Arabic, past or present. The uniqueness of the Qur'ân lies in its distinctive literary style and form. Whatever view one may take of the origin of the Qur'ân, one having some knowledge of Arabic will not fail to notice the difference between the literary style of the Qur'ân and that of the *ḥadîth* literature. They cannot simply have emerged out of the same corpus of "oral traditions".[3]

Fifth, one of Wansborough's main suggestions is that the Qur'ânic text was formulated and "canonized" for liturgic purposes. This is a very wrong conception about the Qur'ânic text. While each and every part of the Qur'ân can be and is used for prayer, its contents deal with doctrines, belief in One Only God, behest to worship Him Alone, description of rewards for obedience to His guidance and of punishment for disobedience, precepts, rules of day-to-day conduct, rites, practices and provisions regarding a variety of subjects relating to man's life and activities. It is simply unhistorical and anachronistic to suggest, as Wansborough does, that the Qur'ân was given its "canonical" and "liturgic" form only late in the second century of Islam; for it presupposes that till that time the Muslims did not use to pray or did not use the Qur'ân in their prayer; both of which presuppositions are completely wrong. There are unimpeachable evidences to show that the Muslims started praying and used the Qur'ân in their prayers since the time of the Prophet, reciting its various long and short *sûrahs*. The

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[2] M. M. al-A'ẓamî, " Orientalists and the Qur'ân", *Impact International*, January, 2000, p. 30.

[3] One line of argument adopted by Donner to disprove Wansborough's hypothesis is to show the difference between the "content" of the Qur'ân and that of the *ḥadîth* literature (Donner, *op. cit*, pp. 39-60). In doing so, however, Donner implicitly lends support to the Goldziher-Schacht theory of the *ḥadîth* literature being a product of later times, which is not correct. Donner also seems to overlook the fact that in many respects the *ḥadîth* literature is elucidatory of the Qur'ân. He is however very right in his general conclusion that "the Qur'ân text is a literary artifact emanating from the earliest community of believers in Arabia".

Qur'ân was "canonized" since the very beginning. Nothing could be a more wanton disregard of history and a worse misunderstanding of Islam and the Qur'ân than to suggest that it was "canonized" after the death of the Prophet as imagined by Nöldeke and his successor orientalists, or as late as the late second century of Islam, as supposed by Wansborough.

Sixth, Wansborough misconceives that some of the passages of the Qur'ân contain "variant versions" of the same information, indicating a process of gradual development of the story. The allusion is to the passages containing stories of the Prophets. This point, it may be recalled, has been made by Margoliouth and Watt, among others, to support their theory of gradual growth in the Prophet's knowledge of Biblical information. The untenability of this latter theory has been pointed out earlier.[1] Wansborough's hypothesis is only an extension of this untenable theory. As one reviewer points out, "even if one concurs with Wansborough's specific conclusion on this point, it remains possible that the development he posits could have taken place within thirty years, rather than two hundred."[2]

Seventh, Wansborough confuses the history and nature of the "variant readings" of some Qur'ânic phrases or expressions as noted by the Muslim commentators themselves and holds that these represent the residue of paraphrasing of Qur'ânic ideas that took place during what he thinks the compilation of the Qur'ânic texts ("masoretic exegesis"), the evolution of Classical Arabic grammar and the development of the exegetical literature – the Qur'ân commentaries. He clearly mixes up a number of independent themes and subjects, particularly the rise of classical Arabic grammar and the development of the science of Qur'ânic commentary. His assumptions and arguments in these two respects have been very effectively challenged and his main thesis of a late Qur'ânic text has been refuted by Versteegh in his recent study: *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ânic Exegesis.*

Eighth, if the Qur'ân was formulated outside Arabia in the Fertile Crescent or Syria, it would invariably have borne an impress of the environment of those regions. Specially the people of these places, particularly those of Syria and Palestine, would not have made Makka the focal point of Islam and the Qur'ân. Instead they would in all likelihood have fixed Jerusalem as the centre and *qibla* of Islam. Yet, not only Makka and the Ka'ba are given special place in the Qur'ân, it

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[1] *Supra*, p. 46ff.
[2] Donner, *op. cit.*, p. 37, citing Graham, op. cit, p. 140.

bears an indelible impress of the environment and life of the Prophet Muhammad himself in Makka and Madina. Apart from the testimony of the reports that are undoubtedly authentic, the internal evidence of the Qur'ân itself proves its contemporaneity with the life and mission of Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him. Besides being a corpus of the message and teachings he delivered, it refers to such events and incidents of his life and in such terms as could not have been inserted by any subsequent Muslim compiler or editor. Thus, besides referring to the contemporary events and incidents like the battles of Badr, 'Uḥud and Khandaq, the objections of the Quraysh unbelievers and the Madinan Jews and replies to those objections, the complaints made by the Prophet to Allah for the opposition and unbelief of the latter, the Qur'ân asks the Prophet, as already mentioned, not to move his tongue quickly to repeat the text delivered to him by the angel,[1] is mildly rebuked for his inattention to a poor and blind enquirer[2], is directed not to drive away poor and humble believers from his company,[3] is asked to compose his temporary misunderstanding with his wives,[4] is warned that if he gave out anything falsely in the name of God he would be severely punished and none would be able to give him any help[5], etc. No subsequent composer or compiler would have mentioned these things in such a way as they are done in the Qur'ân. These statements have all the characteristics of being dictated to the Prophet and delivered by him immediately to his audience. The more closely one examines the text and internal evidence of the Qur'ân the more one will be convinced of its absolute contemporaneity with him.

Ninth, Wansborough's hypothesis that the Qur'ân emerged in a "sectarian milieu" wherein Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Believers hurled ideas and claims against one another until all the groups had clearly defined their doctrinal and confessional identities suggests that the groups mentioned had till then no clearly defined existence. This is totally unhistorical and untenable. No confusion could have been worse confounded. In fact the supposed claims and counter-claims of ideas presuppose the existence of such clearly defined groups. Again, Wansborough recognizes that much of the Qur'ânic text presupposes an important Jewish opposition. This very acknowledgement on his part is a strong argument in favour of the fact that the part of the Qur'ân which refers to the

[1] Q. 75:16.
[2] Q. 80:1-10.
[3] Q. 6:52.
[4] Q. 66:1.
[5] Q. 69:46

Jewish opposition was revealed at the early Madinan period of the Prophet's life when the Jewish opposition to him and to Islam was very strong. We do not know of any such Jewish opposition during the late Umayyad or early 'Abbâsid period.

Tenth, Wansborough and his followers like Cook and Crone seem to labour under some confusion about what they call "oral transmission". The Qur'ân was of course committed to memory by the Prophet (p.b.h.) and many of his companions. But it was not simply "orally transmitted" as such. While committing to memory, the Prophet had also the text of the Qur'ân written on different materials used for writing at that time. The act of memorizing was a simultaneous and additional method of preserving the text. That is why when copies of the Qur'ân were distributed in various parts of the Islamic dominions during the time of Caliph 'Uthmân (r.a., 644-656 A.C.) it did not mean an end to the practice of memorizing the entire Qur'ân by capable Muslims. As already mentioned, the practice has continued since the time of the Prophet till today. This process is by no means what is called "oral transmission" of the text.

Eleventh, the statement that "no Islamic source material from the first century of Islam or so has survived" because "it never existed" is a grossly misleading and incorrect statement. It is misleading because it ignores the Qur'ân as a source material for the early history or rise of Islam and simply adopts the extreme Goldziher-Schacht position regarding the "traditional" accounts, i. e., the *ḥadîth* and *sîrah* literature. But the reports that speak of the coming of the Qur'ân to him and of his mission and struggles are authentic and contemporary. They are reports given by the Prophet's Companions and participants in the events.Nor are they what is called mere "oral transmissions". Many of the Prophet's Companions were in the habit of writing down his statements and utterances[1] so much so that once he had to interfere and ask them not to write down all his statements lest these should be mixed up with the text of the Qur'ân.[2] After his death (632 A.C.) they became all the more careful to act upon his statements and directives and took steps to preserve and transmit them. Thus we know that 'Abân (b. 15 H.), son of the third Caliph 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân (r.a.), collected reports of the Prophet's sayings and deeds and transmitted them to a number of persons including 'Abû Bakr, son of the Prophet's governor of Najran, Muḥammad ibn 'Amr ibn Hazm.[3] Another contemporary of 'Abân's, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (b. 26

[1] *Bukhârî*, nos. 111-113; *Musnad*, II, 192, 207, 215, 403.

[2] *Muslim*, n. 3004,

H.), gained fame as a traditionist and jurist. "His relationship alone", says J. Horovitz, "placed him in the position to obtain numerous accounts concerning the early days of Islam at first hand; from his father, from his mother, and above all from his aunt, 'Â'isha whom he was never tired of visiting and questioning."[2] One of 'Urwah's students, Ibn Shihâb al-Zuhrî (51-124 H.) made a large number of compilations of *ḥadîth* and these were kept in the state store. When Caliph Al-Walîd died in 96. H. these were carried to another repository by means of a number of animals.[3] Thus within less than half a century after the Prophet's death the systematic collection and preservation of *ḥadîth* was started by his surviving companions and their children. The subsequent *ḥadîth* compilations were based on these earlier compilations, supplemented by reports received through unbroken and unimpeachably trustworthy narrators. Nothing could therefore be farther from the truth than Wansborough's assertion that "no Islamic source material from the first century of Islam has survived" or that the "oral transmission" came to be given written form only from the latter half of the eighth century onwards.

Even reports of events given orally by the participants in them after half a century or so of their occurrence are better materials for their history than written records made of them by non-participant contemporaries. That is why personal accounts given even now-a-days by the first world war or second world war veterans who participated in those memorable events or suffered persecution at Hitler's concentration camps are of especial value as source materials for the history of those events.

Last but not least, Wansborough's analysis, as another critic points out, "was guided predominantly by generalizations drawn from the history of the biblical text, which were then applied to Muslim scripture"; but "the vastly different historical contexts in which these supposedly parallel processes took place were not explicitly recognized or taken into account".[4] Further, if "Wansborough is correct that approximately a century and a half elapsed before Muslim scripture was established in 'canonical' form, then none of the surviving manuscripts can be attributed to the Umayyad or even the very early 'Abbâsid period; particularly,

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[1] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabqât*, V, p. 151; Al-Dhahabî, *Siyar*, VI, pp. 351-353.

[2] J. Horovitz, "The Earliest biographies of the Prophet and their authors" (tr. from German by Marmaduke Pickthall), *Islamic Culture*, I, 1927 (pp. 535-559), p. 547.

[3] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqât*, II, p. 389.

[4] Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ân", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1, 1998, pp.2, 3.

one controversial manuscript discovered in San'â' in the 1970, no. 20-33.1, for which a date around the turn of the eighth century has been proposed".[1]

We shall presently come to the subject of the San'â' find. Before doing so, however, it would be worthwhile to see how the Schacht-Wansborough virus has affected some others.

III. YAHUDA D. NEVO ET AL : DIGGING THE EARTH TO BURY THE PAST

Wansborough of course prefaced his absurd theories with the safety phrases that these were "conjectural", "provisional " and tentative and emphatically provisional."[2] Such safety phrases are, however, typical with many other orientalists like Muir and Watt whose writings are replete with them and who seem to be quite aware that such phrases are only a matter of form and that their use is the more likely to make their theories accepted as established facts with willing and predisposed minds. In fact this has happened to many of their conjectures and assumptions; and exactly that has happened with Wansborough's too. Especially his theories have become "contagious" in certain circles, as one of this group puts it.[3] In any case, two of the "revisionists" who have apparently caught severely the contagion of Wansborough's fallacies are J. Koren and Yahuda D. Nevo and they have set themselves to supplement Wansborough's theories by archaeological evidence and thus to dismantle the sources of Islamic history and to prove Islam, Muslims and the Qur'ân as non-entities during the first two centuries of the Hijrî era. Koren and Nevo postulate as follows:

(a) That it "is necessary to corroborate a view derived solely from the Muslim literary account" by the "hard facts" of material remains; "and where the two conflict, the latter should be preferred";

(b) that if there is no evidence for an event outside of the "traditional account", this should be taken as "positive evidence in support of the hypothesis that it did not happen."[4]

Proceeding from these two postulates Yehuda De Nevo argued that archaeological excavations carried out in the Jordanian desert and the Hijaz have unearthed a number of Hellenistic, Nabataean, Roman and early Byzantine

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[1] *Ibid.* p. 3, citing H. C. von Bothmer, " Architekturbilder im Koran:Ein Parchthandschrift der Umayyadenzeit aus dem Yemen", *Pantheon,* 45 (1987), pp. 4-20.

[2] J. Wansborough, *Qur'ânic Studies etc.,* Oxford, 1977, p. xi; *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of the Islamic Salvation History,* Oxford, 1978, p. x.

[3] Toby Lester, *op. cit.,* p. 55.

[4] J. Koren and Y. D. Nevo, " Methodological approaches to Islamic Studies", *Der Islam,* Band 68, Haft. 1, p. 91-92.

remains. They show no signs of local Arab cultures from the sixth and early seventh centuries, "except for some tumuli in the Jordanian desert... In particular, no sixth or seventh century Jâihilî pagan sites, and no pagan sanctuaries such as the Muslim sources describe have been found in the Hijâz or indeed anywhere in the area surveyed. Judging from archaeology, the pagan cults these sources describe were not a Hijâzî phenomenon. Furthermore, the archaeological work has revealed no trace of Jewish settlement at Medina, Xaybar or Wadi al-Qurra. Both these points contrast directly with the Muslim literary sources' descriptions of the demographic composition of the pre-Islamic Hijaz." If the Muslim sources did really "preserve an historical account of sixth and early seventh century Hijazi society, the archaeological work already done should have revealed at least some points of correlation with it". On the other hand, excavations carried out in the Central Negev have revealed some thirty pagan sites showing that "active pagans must have formed a considerable part of the Negev population right through the first one and a half centuries of the Muslim era". "These pagan centres correlate highly with the description of the Jâhilî pagan sanctuaries in the Muslim literary sources, especially regarding the topography of the sites and layout of the buildings. Thus the archaeological evidence indicates that the pagan sanctuaries described in the Muslim sources did not exist in the Jahili Hijaz, but sanctuaries strongly resembling them did exist in the Central Negev until soon after the 'Abbasids came to power. This in turn suggests that the accounts of the Jahili religion in the Hijaz could well be back-projections of a paganism actually known from later and elsewhere."[1]

Elaborating these views in another article Nevo states that the study of a number of early Arabic inscriptions from the Negev and elsewhere suggest the existence of a generic monotheism as well as a Judaeo-Christian environment in the Negev in the late first and second centuries A.H. "From the fact that the Qur'ân exhibits a 'prophetical' Judaeo-Christianity and the basic class does not," writes Nevo, "I conclude that the general Judaeo-Christian sectarian environment was widespread, including at least one group defined by adherence to a prophet, whose corpus of logia form the basis of the Qur'ân. From the fact that the Qur'ân contains many phrases present in the Muslim inscriptions of the late second century A. H. and later, but absent from the inscriptions of Hisâm's days

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

or earlier, I would conclude that it was canonized quite late, i. e., after these phrases had entered the religious vocabulary."[1]

Now, Nevo and Koren are wrong in their premise that no Islamic source material from the first century of Islam or so has survived because there never existed any. It is simply a reiteration of the Goldziher-Schacht-Wansborough view about the sources of Islamic history with the exception that, while Wansborough guards his assumption by stating that it is "tentative and emphatically provisional", Koren and Nevo take is as an established fact. As shown above, it is a totally incorrect assumption and is also rejected as such by the more sober section of the orientalists themselves. And just as the extreme views of Goldziher, Schacht and Wansborough elicited sharp criticisms from members of their own rank, so the views of Koren and Nevo have come under attack by the more reasonable of the orientalists. Thus, for instance, Estelle Whelan squarely joined issue with them in an article under caption: "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ân".[2] Simultaneously Donner also points out that Yehuda Nevo's argument is circular. "The absence of specifically Qur'ânic or Muslim phraseology from the generic monotheism of the earliest Negev texts... may be taken as evidence for late codification of the Qur'ân only if we knew that the Qur'ânic texts crystallized in this region (i. e., the Negev, or at least geographical Syria) rather than somewhere else, such as Arabia; but the crystallization of the Qur'ân outside Arabia is merely another of Nevo's (and Wansborough's) assumptions, not a known fact."[3]

Estelle Whelan is more decisive in her refutation of De Nevo's assumption. She points out three kinds of historical evidence showing the early codification of the Qur'ân, namely, the Umayyad inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, Al-Wâlid's inscription at the Great Mosque of Madina and the information about the existence of a group of Qur'ân copyists at Madina since the middle of the first century of Islam.[4]

There are two long inscriptions in blue-and-gold glass mosaic, encircling respectively the inner and outer faces of the octagonal arcade of the Dome. They were executed in 72/691-92 by Khalîfa 'Abd al-Malik and they are still preserved in their entirety except for the substitution of the name of the 'Abbâsid al-Ma'mûn (198-218/813-33), who did not however, change the foundation date,

[1] Y. D. Nevo, "Towards a pre-history of Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam,* Vol. 17, 1994, pp. 125-126.
[2] *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* Vol. 118, No. 1, 1998, pp.
[3] Donner, *op. cit.,* p. 62
[4] Estelle Whelan, op. cit., *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* Vol. 118, No. 1, 1988, pp. 1-14.

"which thus ensures that the inscriptions were actually executed in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik." Both the inscriptions begin on the south side of the octagon and they contain the *shahâdah,* "in the same form in which it appears on the reform coinage of 'Abd al-Malik introduced five years later, and is followed by a series of excerpts from different parts of the Qur'ân as it is now constituted." The minor textual variations noticeable in the inscriptions, points out Whelan, were clearly introduced to fit the sense. "Such alteration of the standard Qur'ânic text in order to express a particular theme seems always to have been acceptable in Islamic inscriptions, however rigidly the actual recitation of the Qur'ân may have been regulated". Even inscriptions of much later dates embody such variations.[1] One may add that such use of Qur'ânic phrases and passages in writings and lectures, with necessary modifications as are required by the context and theme, has always been the practice of Muslims in speeches, sermons and writings; and it is intended to give weight and classical literary styles to the themes presented. Such sermons and writings presuppose the familiarity of the audience and readers with the Qur'ânic text and they are never intended to be understood as the Qur'ân. Had the codification of the Qur'ân taken place in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik or later, rightly points out Whelan, it is difficult to believe that the arrangement of the passages as they appear in the Dome of the Rock inscriptions would not have influenced the "canonical" arrangement. "It seems particularly unlikely that the combination of phrases from 64:1 and 57:2, repeated twice, could originally have been a unitary statement that was then 'deconstructed' and incorporated into different parts of the Qur'ân."[2]

In this connection Whelan points out the mistake of P. Crone and M. Cook[3] in questioning the value of the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock as evidence for the "literary" form of the text of the Qur'ân as a whole at that early date. They are particularly mistaken in thinking that there is an "extensive deviance " from the text of these inscriptions in the texts of two copper plaques on the exterior faces of the lintels over the inner doors in the eastern and northern entrances respectively. "Closer scrutiny of the two copper plaques", states Whelan, " suggests that the question is not one of 'extensive deviance'; rather, the one inscription is not primarily Qur'ânic in character, and the other is a combination of Qur'ânic fragments and paraphrases that makes sense..." They

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Here Whelan refers to P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977, pp.18,; 167, n. 18.

"belong to a tradition of using Qur'ânic and other familiar phrases, paraphrases, and allusions in persuasive messages..." There has been "throughout the history of Islam" a concern for preserving the integrity of the Qur'ânic text, " but side by side with that concern there has been a tradition of drawing upon and modifying that text for a variety of rhetorical purposes... The tradition was, however, dependent upon recognition of the text by the listeners, or readers – a strong indication that the Qur'ân was already the common property of the community in the last decade of the seventh century."[1] There are many instances of such creative use of familiar Qur'ânic phrases and passages in documents, inscriptions and literary works. The brief Qur'ânic passages on Umayyad coins issued from 77/697 to the end of the dynasty in 132/750 are additional examples of such use. The passages on these coins include 112:1-4 and part of 9:33. "In parallel to the contemporary inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock these extracts are clearly intended to declare the primacy of the new religion of Islam..."[2]

The second piece of evidence relating to the form of the Qur'ânic text to which Whelan draws attention is the inscription on the *qiblah* wall of the Prophet's Mosque at Madina, "long since lost but observed and described by Abû 'Alî Ibn Rustah during the pilgrimage of 290/903."[3] The inscription extended from *Bâb Marwân* (*Bâb al-Salâm*) in the western wall around the southwestern corner and across the *qiblah* wall, then around the southeastern corner to *Bâb Jibrîl*. It consisted of *sûrah* 1 (*al-Fâtiḥah*) and *sûrahs* 91-114 (*al-shams* to *al-Nâs*). Ibn Rustah's account is corroborated by the eyewitness account of an anonymous Spanish traveller who mentions that it was written in five lines of gold on a blue ground contained within a marble panel. It was "thus probably executed in gold-and-blue glass mosaic, as at the Dome of the Rock... Another parallel to the Dome of the Rock was the inscription's characters, described as squat and thick, in a stroke the width of a finger." It was executed during the reconstruction of the Mosque between 88/706 and 91/710 by 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azîz, then Khalîfah Al-Walid's governor of Madina. Because of this early date, observes Whelan, this inscription is particularly significant, for "it suggests that the sequence of the Qur'ânic text from *sûrahs* 91 to 114 had already been established by 91/710." Also, "the clustering of the short *sûrahs* in this sequence probably means that the arrangement of the entire Qur'ân generally in the order of the length of the *sûrahs*

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1 Estelle Whelan, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 7, 8.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

3 *Ibid*, citing Ibn Rustah, *Kitâb al-a'lâq al-nafîsah*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1892; reprinted Leiden, 1967, p. 70.

had already been adopted.... 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azîz, the one Umayyad whose piety was respected even by the 'Abbâsid enemies of his family, is unlikely to have admitted anything but the officially recognized version of the Qur'ânic text".[1] A study of the reports of Ibn Rustah and others suggests that there had been an inscription of Al-Walîd on the southern facade of the courtyard which the Khârijites destroyed in 130/747. Also the fifteenth century historian al-Samhûdî cites al-Wâqidî and Ibn Zabâlah to the effect that there were inscriptions inside and outside and on the doors of the mosque.[2] "The expression of political claims through Qur'ânic quotations and allusions suggests wide familiarity with these verses and their implications in the early Islamic community, between 72/691-92 and 132/750. In fact,... there is abundant evidence from the Umayyad period that it [the Qur'ânic text] was already sufficiently familiar to the community at large to provide easily recognizable claims to political legitimation and for religious propaganda."[3]

The third item of evidence adduced by Whelan is the multiplicity of references pointing to the existence of a group of professional Qur'ân copyists at Madina since the very middle of the first century of Islam and to a specific area of the city where manuscripts of the Qur'ân were copied and sold.[4] Madina functioned as an Islamic intellectual centre in the Umayyad period before the rise of the cities in Iraq and there had been sufficient demand for the newly codified scripture, "both for public use in mosques and schools and for private study" to ensure employment for such a group. The references are so scattered in texts so different in character and period, and they are so peripheral to the main accounts and the individuals so insignificant that it is hard to conceive that they have been part of a pious forgery concocted at the end of the eighth century. "All point to the active production of copies of the Qur'ân from the late seventh century, coinciding with and confirming the inscriptional evidence of the established text itself. In fact, from the time of Mu'âwiyyah through the reign of al-Walîd the Umayyad caliphs were actively engaged in codifying every aspect of Muslim religious practice. Mu'âwiyah turned Muhammad's *minbar* into a symbol of authority and ordered the construction of *maqsûrahs* in the major congregational mosques. 'Abd al-Malik made sophisticated use of Qur'ânic quotations, on coinage and public monuments, to announce the new Islamic world order. Al-Walîd gave

[1] Whelan, *op.cit.*, p. 9
[2] *Ibid*, citing Al-Samhûdî, *Wafâ' al-Wafâ bi Dâr al-Muṣṭafâ*, ed. M. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamîd, Cairo, Vol. I, p. 371.
[3] Whalan, *op.cit. p. 10.*
[4] *Ibid*, pp. 10-12.

monumental form to the Muslim house of worship and the service conducted in it. It seems beyond the bounds of credibility that such efforts would have preceded interest in codifying the text itself. The different types of evidence cited here all thus lead to the conclusion that the Muslim tradition is reliable, at least in broad outline, in attributing the first codification of the Qur'ânic text to 'Uthmân and his appointed commission. The Qur'ân was available to his successors as an instrument to help weld the diverse peoples of the rapidly expanding empire into a relatively unified polity."[1]

De Nevo is thus wrong in his assumptions, based on his interpretations of the Negev inscriptions and on the ideas of Schacht and Wansborough about the Qur'ân and Islamic history in general. Apart from the points made by Donner and Whelan, however, there are a number of other weakness and fallacies in the Koren-Nevo assumption. First, the dogmatic assertion that the absence of corroborative evidence for information about an event derived from Islamic sources has to be taken as "positive evidence in support of the hypothesis that it did not happen" is a wrong and a seriously misleading methodology. Such a methodology is not suitable even in respect of many an event in modern and contemporary history, not to speak of ancient and pre-modern times, for which one has often to depend on solitary and not quite contemporary evidence. Many of the biblical narratives were written thousands of years after the events they describe, depending on the "collective memory" of the society; and many of them have no corroborative evidence whatsoever. So is the case with the early annals of Greece and Rome. Yet, no sober historian will reject them as non-events simply because there is no corroborative evidence.

Second, Nevo says that because excavations so far carried out have not revealed in the Hijaz any pagan site of the sort described in the Muslim sources, whereas some thirty such pagan sites have been discovered in the Central Negev, "the accounts of the Jâhilî religion in the Hijaz could well be projections of a paganism known from later and elsewhere." The assumption is based on a number of fallacies. (a) It assumes that all necessary excavations have been carried out in Arabia and nothing more remains to be done. This is not at all the case. (b) It fails to recognize that idols and idolatrous shrines were more thoroughly destroyed in the Hijaz after the establishment of Islam there than in other regions which came gradually under the fold of Islam. (c) It fails to understand the origin

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

and nature of idolatrous practices and shrines existing in the Hijâz prior to the rise of Islam. (d) It fails to understand the nature of the rise of Islam and assumes that it rose merely as a reaction to paganism in Arabia. Finally, (e) it fails to see the implications of the assumption of back-projection which raises more questions than it solves.

The last three points may be elaborated a little. Polytheism and idolatry were not indigenous to the Ismâ'ilite Arabs of Hijaz and Arabia. It was introduced among them long after the time of Prophet Ismâ'îl, peace be on him. According to authentic reports, idolatry was introduced at Makka after its occupation by Banû Khuzâ'ah, particularly by their leader 'Amr ibn Luḥayy.[1] Ibn Isḥâq informs us that 'Amr once went to Syria where he observed the people worshipping idols. He enquired of the reasons for their doing so; and as they informed him that the idols bestowed on them many advantages he purchased from them the idol of Ḥubal which he brought to Makka, placed it near the Ka'ba and asked his people to worship it. As they considered him their leader and wise man they started worshipping the idol.[2] According to another report 'Amr ibn Luhayy introduced also the worship of the images of *Wadd, Suwâ', Yaghûth, Ya'ûq* and *Nasr,* the gods of Prophet Nûḥ's unbelieving people.[3] These represented certain cults relating to astral worship or deification of the forces of nature and they were prevalent in ancient Assyria and Babylonia (Iraq), the land of Nûḥ's people, as the Qur'ân clearly states.[4] It is thus clear that idolatry was exogenous to the Ismâ'ilite Arabs. Though it was rather widespread among them on the eve of the rise of Islam, it was not deep-rooted and as such no elaborate mythology had developed round them in Arabia as was the case with regard to the idolatry in ancient Greece, India and Assyria-Babylonia. In fact the Arabic word for idol, *ṣanam*, as one modern scholar points out, "is clearly an adaptation of Aramaic *sélém*."[5] In view of this fact, it is no wonder that idolatry was more thoroughly wiped out in Hijaz after the coming of Islam than was the case with regard to Negev (Syria) and elsewhere. In fact, far from contradicting the information contained in the Muslim sources, the Negev archaeological remains do corroborate what the

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[1] *Bukhârî*, nos., 3521, 4623-4624; *Muslim*, no. 2856; *Musnad*, II, 275-276; III, 318, 353, 354; V, 137.

[2] Ibn Hishâm, *Al-Sîrat al-Nabawiyyah*, (ed. Muṣṭafâ al-Saqqâ and others), Beirut 1391/1971, pp. 78-79; Ibn al-Kalbî, *Kitâb al-Asnâm*, ed. Ahmad Zakî Pâshâ, Cairo, 1343/1924, p. 8

[3] Ibn Ḥajr, *Fatḥ al-Bârî*, VI, p. 634.

[4] Q. 71:23.

[5] P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 1986 reprint, p. 100, n. 2.

classical Muslim accounts say about the import of polytheism into Arabia from Syria and Iraq.

Nevo's assumption proceeds also from a misunderstanding of the nature of the rise of Islam as merely a reaction to Arabian paganism so that he suggests that the eighth century Muslims found it necessary to project the paganism found in the Negev desert back into sixth century Hijaz as justification for the rise of Islam. The Qur'ân does of course reject and disapprove idolatry as it existed in Arabia, but it does not do only that. It condemns and forbids all sorts of beliefs and practices that infringe strict monotheism, existing in the world then or now. Thus it disapproves and forbids the worship of the sun and the moon and other heavenly bodies.[1] This kind of polytheism was prevalent not only among the people of Prophet Ibrâhîm in Iraq; it was prevalent throughout the world from the east and the west, as the existence of the celebrated Temple of Heaven at Beijing (China) and the discovery of a number of Sun-Pyramids and Moon-Pyramids and other pyramids in the south-east Asia through north Africa to South America unmistakably prove. The Qur'ân categorically prohibits the worship of the sun, the moon, the stars or other natural phenomena like mountains, trees, rivers or special animals. "Do not make obeisance to the sun and the moon";[2] "Do you not see that to Allah make obeisance all those who are in the heavens and the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the animals?"[3] It also forbids the worship of the clouds, lightning or thunder emphasizing: "He it is Who shows you the lightning by way of fear and hope, and He produces the heavy clouds. And the thunder sings His praise and the angels, out of His dread; and He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute about Allah.."[4] It also prohibits the deification of angels, Prophets and prominent personalities and worshipping them as gods, as many people did then and still do. "He does not ask you to take the angels and the Prophets as lords..."[5] "Verily those whom you make prayers to besides Allah are created beings like you."[6] It disapproves and prohibits the practice of the Zoroastrians and others of worshipping two gods, one of good and the other of evil, or of light and

[1] Q. 6:76-79.
[2] Q. 41:37
[3] Q. 22:18. See also 13:15; 16:49.
[4] Q. 13:12-13.
[5] Q. 3:80
[6] Q. 7:194.

darkness: "Do not take two gods. He is but God the One."[1] "All the praise is due to Allah Who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light. Yet those who disbelieve set equals to their Lord."[2] The Qur'ân is replete with prohibitions against setting partners with Allah in any form. In the same strain it decries the practice of attributing sons or daughters to Him, in deifying the Prophet Jesus and worshipping him as god, the concept of the Trinity, the practice of some of the Jews in worshipping the golden calf and considering 'Uzayr as son of God, and their tampering in other ways with the scripture given to them.

It is on this last score that Wansborough and his followers allege that the Qur'ân is "polemical". The Qur'ân is critical not only of Christianity and Judaism, it is so with regard to every type of polytheism and paganism. The reference to the specific forms of beliefs and practices show, on the one hand, that these were the prevalent forms of polytheism and paganism throughout the world at the time and, on the other, that all these types of polytheism were reflected in some form or other in the religious scenario of Arabia on the eve of the rise of Islam. The peculiarity of the situation was that while each of the other regions of the world was bedevilled by one or the other form of paganism, Arabia seems to have turned into a museum of all the varieties of paganism. Viewed in this latter context, one may even appreciate the appropriateness of the coming of the last Prophet and the Qur'ân in Arabia. The background and perspective of the rise of Islam was as universal and comprehensive as are its message and address.

Because of a failure to understand this nature of the Qur'ânic attack on all types of paganism and polytheism Nevo and his co-thinkers err in suggesting that the later Muslims not only projected the Negev paganism back into the sixth century Arabia but also borrowed the Judaeo-Christian concept of monotheism marked by adherence to a Prophet, as prevalent in the Negev region, and thus formulated the Qur'ân. This suggestion is only an amalgam of the old Geiger-Muir-Margoliouth theory of the Judaeo-Christian origin of the Qur'ân and Islam on the one hand, and the Schacht-Wansborough assumption of back-projection of the Islamic traditions and scripture, on the other, grafted on to what De Nevo conceives to be the archaeological and epigraphic evidence against the Qur'ân. The fallacy of the theory of Judaeo-Christian origin of Islam has been demonstrated earlier.[3] Here it may be pointed out that the Qur'ân does not ignore

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[1] Q. 16:51.
[2] Q. 6:1.

the existence of Judaism and Christianity. It rather criticises them as deviations from the original and true monotheism communicated by the previous Prophets. Indeed the Qur'ân does not claim to deliver any new message. It seeks only to revive and complete the message of monotheism of the previous Prophets, mentioning specifically that its message is to be found in the original scriptures given to Ibrâhîm (Abraham) and Mûsâ (Moses).[2] It also demands belief in all the previous Prophets, including Ya'qûb (Jacob), the progenitor of the Children of Isrâ'îl, and 'Îsâ (Jesus), whom the Christians have deified. The originality of the Qur'ân lies not in its giving out any new message, but in its insistence on the unity of God, the unity of His message, the unity of His Prophets and Messengers, and the unity of His creation – mankind – and in its rejection of any concept of His message and love having been restricted to any particular community and country. In view of these, how very wrong is the suggestion that it surreptitiously borrowed Judaeo-Christian concepts and bruited abroad a new religion! The Qur'ân also points out that despite deviations from the pure monotheism delivered by the previous prophets, and despite persecution by the deviant groups, small monotheistic groups and isolated individuals persisted here and there.[3] The Islamic classical accounts also refer to a class of monotheists known as *ḥanîfs* existing on the eve of the rise of Islam. Thus the "generic" or "basic monotheism" which the Negev inscriptions reveal do, far from contradicting the Islamic accounts, only corroborate their truth and the truth of the Qur'ân.

Nevo and his mentors also fail to see the implications of the theory of back-projection. Apart from the utter improbability of fabricating all the different and divergent facts and incidents relating to persons and events scattered over different regions and periods, the simple question that presents itself before a reader is: Why should the 'Abbâsid authorities, if they did indeed invent the story of the Prophet and the Qur'ân, have credited a non-Abbâsid individual to be the recipient of the revelation? Also, if the Qur'ân was formulated in the region of Negev, why not Jerusalem, instead of Makka, should have been stated as the venue of the revelation? The Arabs are, of all people, very sensitive about their ancestry and ancestors. If the Makkan Quraysh people were not idolaters and pagans on the eve of the rise of Islam, none of their descendants of the Umayyads or the 'Abbâsids would have tolerated the act of tarnishing their

[1] *Supra*, ch. II.
[2] Q. 87:18-19.
[3] See for instance Q. 85:4-8.

ancestors' memories by falsely imputing idolatry and paganism to them. If the Jews were not settled at Madina, Khaybar and other places in northern Arabia, why should there have been any necessity for inventing the stories of the battles with them? The allegedly fabricated Qur'ânic message could as well have been delivered without having recourse to such stories. But for one thing, Nevo is seriously mistaken in so categorically stating that there is no material evidence of the existence of the Jewish settlement at Madina. The remains of the fort (*ḥiṣn*) of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, a leader of the Madinan Jews, in the southern periphery of Madina, is still preserved as an archaeological monument. Incidentally, the Qur'ân very clearly refers to the Jewish forts at Madina.[1]

Thus the suggestions of De Nevo, which are only a reiteration and adaptation of the assumptions advanced by the Wansborough-Crone-Cook trio, are both unreasonable and untenable. It is in the context of these assumptions, however, that the discovery of certain Qur'ânic manuscripts at the Yamani capital San'â' in the seventies furnished the ground for fresh speculations.

IV. THE SAN'Â' FIND : FRESH SPECULATIONS

In 1972 a stock of old parchments manuscripts containing manuscripts of the Qur'ân was discovered in the loft of the Great Mosque of San'â'. In the early eighties the Yamanî Antiquities Authority, particularly its president Qâdî Ismâ'îl al-Akwa', invited through the German Foreign Ministry two German experts, Dr. Gerd. R. Puin and H. C. Graf Von Bothmer, for the restoration and preservation of the manuscripts. They worked at San'â' for some years in this project. It appears that besides being experts in restoration and preservation of manuscripts they had "orientalist" motives; for, it is reported that Bothmer made microfilm copies of some 35,000 sheets of the manuscripts and took them to Germany. In 1987 he wrote an article on these manuscripts mentioning, among other things, that one of them, no. 1033-32, could be assigned a date in the last quarter of the first *hijrî* century. More orientalist in nature was however the article which Puin wrote under title: "Observations on Early Qur'ân Manuscripts in Ṣan'â'".[2] These writings attracted the attention of the orientalists to the San'â manuscripts and they held a seminar at Leiden in 1998 on "Qur'ânic Studies" at which both Bothmer and Puin delivered lectures on the Ṣan'â' manuscripts.

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[1] Q. 59:2

[2] Published in Stefan Wilde (ed.), *The Qur'ân as Text*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1966, pp. 107-111.

It is not known what exactly they said there on the subject; but the above mentioned article of Puin clearly shows his intentions and conclusions on the subject. In the main he stresses three things in the article. First, he refers to the attempts made previously by the orientalists like Jeffery Arthur, Otto Pretzel. Antony Spitaler and A. Fischer to collect the existing manuscripts of the Qur'ân in order to prepare what they call a revised version by comparing any differences in them and regretfully mentions that the very large number of manuscripts collected for the purpose at the University of Munich, Germany, were destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. He then expresses the hope that the Ṣan'â' find offers an opportunity to resume that project of work.[1] Second, he mentions what he has been able to note the "discrepancies" in the Ṣan'â' manuscripts and says: (a) In a number of manuscripts the letter *'alif* (*hamzah*) is written in an incorrect way; (b) there are some differences in the numbering of *'âyahs* in some *sûrahs* and (c) in two or three sheets he has found *sûrahs* written not in the order as found in the Qur'ân in circulation.[2] Third, he recognizes that these "discrepancies" are minor and they would not probably lead to any sudden and significant advance in the field of Qur'ânic studies. Nonetheless he asserts that the Qur'ân, though it claims to be "clear" (*mubîn*) is not so and that the existence of the above mentioned "discrepancies" show that the *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân were not written down in their final form during the lifetime of the Prophet and that it is probable that a Qur'ân with a different order of the *sûrahs* was in circulation for a long time.[3]

It must at once be pointed out that these statements and conclusions are clearly far-fetched and totally untenable. Before discussing this, however, it is necessary to point out that this writing of Puin (and also of Bothmer) gave rise to wide-spread and wild speculations in the orientalist circles if only because these fell on ready and willing ears. One of the orientalist writers, Toby Lester, held telephonic conversations with Puin[4] on the subject and then put forth an article in the January 1999 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* under caption: "What is the Qur'ân?".[5] The article is made up of three types of materials: (a) information about the *Ṣan'â'* find and the conclusions said to have been arrived at by Puin and

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 108-110.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 111.
[4] See Puin's letter to Qâḍî Ismâ'îl al-Akwa', dated 14. 2.1999, reproduced in *Impact International*, Vol. 30, Mrach 2000, p. 27.
[5] *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999, pp. 43-56.

Bothmer; (b) assumptions of the other orientalists like Wansborough, Cook, Crone, Nevo and J. A. Bellamy about the Qur'ân and (c) indications about what the orientalists are doing or propose to do in the field of Qur'ânic studies.

As regards the San'â' manuscripts Toby Lester inflates and reiterates the views of Puin and says that according to him the Qur'ân came into being through a process of evolution over a long period; that it is a not a book sent down from the heaven on the Prophet in the seventh Christian century; that it is not "clear" (*mubîn*) as it claims to be, every fifth of its *'âyahs* being either unintelligible or inexplicable and that there are instances of palimpsests or overwriting of some words or expressions in some sheets of the manuscripts. Lester further alleges that the Yamanî authorities are unwilling to allow detailed study of the manuscripts for fear of causing uneasiness in the Islamic world but, nonetheless, these manuscripts will help the orientalists in proving that the Qur'ân has a "history" just as the Bible has a "history". As regards the assumptions of the other orientalists like Wansborough, Cook and Crone Lester sums up their views as already noted. Regarding the statements of J. A. Bellamy, we shall presently notice them.

This article of Toby Lester, more than the articles of Puin and Bothmer, caused a wave of protests and anger against the Yamani authorities' handling of the manuscripts which in turn led Puin and Bothmer to fear that their relationship with the latter would be adversely affected. Hence each of them hurried to write a letter to Qâdî Ismâ'îl al-Akwa' to clarify their position. In his letter Puin defended himself as well as his colleague Bothmer and denied having said that there was among the manuscripts a different Qur'ân than the one currently in circulation, that there was no basis of truth for what the American journal had alleged about their researches about the Qur'ân and that the press campaign was intended to harm the academic relationship between them and the Yamani authorities.[1]

This defence of Puin is in fact a mere twisting and turning of the words and it does not tally with what he actually says in his article. He says, as we have noticed, that the Qur'ân, though it claims to be "clear" (*mubîn*) is not so, that the alleged "discrepancies" show that the *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân were not written down in their final form during the lifetime of the Prophet and that it is probable that a Qur'ân with a different order of the *sûrahs* was in circulation for a long time.

[1] See copy of Puin's letter, reproduced in the *Impact International, op.cit.*

He also says that the Ṣan'â' find offers an opportunity to the orientalists to resume the work of preparing a revised version of the Qur'ân. It is therefore necessary to discuss briefly the discrepancies and inaccuracies in the statements of Puin himself.

First, in his reference to the collection of the Qur'ânic manuscripts at the University of Munich and the efforts of the orientalists in that connection Puin omits to mention a very important fact. It is that, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War the authorities in charge of those manuscripts had actually issued a statement on the basis of their study of them. They had said that a study and comparison of the manuscripts, though not complete, had not revealed any discrepancy and difference in the texts except minor spelling mistakes in some places which was natural and all of which did not, however, affect the correctness and integrity of the Qur'ânic text as a whole.[1] The "discrepancies" in the writing of *'alif* at some places to which Puin refers belongs to this type of error or style in writing and they do not in any way affect the integrity and correctness of the text as a whole.

Second, slight difference in the numbering of *'âyahs* with regard to some *sûrahs* which Puin notices with regard to a few *sûrahs* is quite natural. Such difference in the numbering of *'âyahs* is acknowledged even by some classical Muslim scholars and it does not affect the text at all. Even the wellknown orientalist Flugel's numbering of the *'âyahs* of some *sûrahs* differs slightly from the standard numbering. Significantly enough, while speaking about the difference in numbering of *'âyahs* Puin does not at all indicate any difference in the text of the *sûrahs*.

Third, palimpsests or overwriting of words or expressions in a few places do not suggest anything more than correction of mistakes committed in the writing of the words in the first instance. It cannot be a proof in support of the theory of revision or evolution of the text unless an earlier copy of the Qur'ân containing different words and expressions in the same places is shown to exist. This has not been found in the Ṣan'â' manuscripts nor shown by any other orientalist to have ever been in existence.

Fourth, the conclusion that the *sûrahs* were not written down in their final form during the lifetime of the Prophet or that a Qur'ân with a different ordering of the *sûrahs* was in circulation for a long time just because two or three sheets

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[1] See Muhammad Hamidullah, *Khutabât-i-Bhawalpur* (Urdu text), Tahqîqât-i-Islamî, Islamabad, 1985, pp. 20-21; also reproduced in the *Impact International*, March 2000, p. 28.

have been found whereon some *sûrahs* have been written in a different order, that is *sûrahs* from different places of the Qur'ân in circulation have been put together, is hasty and untenable. It is important to note that it has been the habit of Muslims since the very beginning to make collection of selected *surahs* in one compilation for purposes of study and memorisation, especially by students at *madrasahs*. And since mosques were invariably educational institutions, it is not at all strange that such collection of selected *sûrahs* should be found in a stock of Arabic manuscripts stored in a great mosque. In any case, by the very admission of Puin, this is confined to two or three manuscript sheets only out of more than 35,000 sheets. Before hazarding such a serious conclusion Puin and his sort should have got hold of a copy of the Qur'ân, or a considerable part of the Qur'ân, showing a different ordering of the *sûrahs* than that found in the existing Qur'ân.

Even the existence of a complete copy of the Qur'ân with a different order of the *sûrahs* does not *ipso facto* prove that such a Qur'ân prevailed among the Muslims unless it is proved that it was accepted and acted upon by them at any given time; for it is well known that for academic and other purposes the Qur'ân has been published from time to time with *sûrahs* arranged according to the order of their revelation. Thus, for instance, A. Rodwell published an English translation of the Qur'ân in 1861 rearranging the *sûrahs* according to their order of publication under caption: *The Coran :Translated from the Arabic, the surhas arranged in chronological order.*[1] And early in the twentieth century a Muslim of Bengal, Mirza Abul Fazl, issued a new translation arranging the *sûrahs* according to the order of their revelation.[2] Similarly Richard Bell made another translation in the early thirties with what he called a "critical rearrangement of the *sûrahs*."[3] It has also been pointed out that the orientalists aim at preparing and publishing what they call a revised and corrected edition of the Qur'ân. And of late, as Toby Lester has mentioned in his article, J. A. Bellamy has made this suggestion on the assumption that he has found a number of "mistakes" in the Qur'ân. The existence of a Qur'ân with a different arrangement of the *sûrahs* or with what is called "corrections" and "revisions" cannot be cited as proof that such a Qur'ân has ever been in use among the Muslims.

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[1] London, Williams and Norgate, 1861.

[2] Mirza Abul Fazl, *The Qur'ân, Arabic Text and English Translation, Arranged Chronologically*, 1911 (British Museum Catalogue no. 1452.d.15).

[3] R. Bell, *The Quran: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the sûrahs*, T& T Clark, Edinburgh, 1937.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE TEXT OF THE QUR'ÂN: I. THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE AND THE THEORY OF REVISION

I. ON THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN GENERAL

The orientalists' views about the text of the Qur'ân are related to their views about the Qur'ânic *waḥy* (revelation) itself. Since they think and try to prove that the Qur'ân is the Prophet's own composition they naturally tend to attribute to it all the conceivable merits and drawbacks associated with human work. As regards the literary merit and style of language the views of the orientalists veer from appreciation to depreciation and *vice versa.*

One of the modern orientalists who expressed a decidedly favourable opinion about the literary merit of the Qur'ân was Dr. William Nassau Lees whom the British colonial administration in India had appointed, in succession to Dr. Aloys Sprenger, as Principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, then the premier institution of Islamic learning in Bengal, in order to transform it into an institution for teaching Arabic as language and literature by divesting its curricula of the Qur'ân and *ḥadîth.*[1] The projected reconstitution of the Madrasa of course elicited sharp but unsuccessful opposition of the Muslim teachers and students of the institution. Lees, however, took courage to point out the relevance of studying the Qur'ân as a masterpiece of Arabic language and literature. In a report submitted to the government in 1855 he wrote:

"In comparison with most of the Arabic works the style and language of the 'Koran' must certainly be considered not only elegant, but even beautiful. It is highly expressive ... Indeed, in parts the language is lofty, and in passages where the majesty and grandeur of the Deity are described, may be said to approach the sublime. It has been universally allowed by Arabs of all ages ... to be written with the greatest elegance and in the purest of language, and, as a composition, incomparable. It is ... the basis upon which the whole system of Arabic grammar has been constructed, and from it almost all examples have been extracted. It is the test, the touchstone, by which every composition is tried, the standard to which the language of all must be applied; nay, it is part and parcel of Arabic literature itself, for, I might almost, without hesitation, assert that no orthodox Moslem has ever written an Arabic work of any description that did not contain countless allusions to and frequent extracts from it, to understand and appreciate which an intimate knowledge of the 'Book', as it is termed, is undoubtedly required."[2]

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[1] See for an account of the "secularization" of the Calcutta Madrasa by the British colonial administration M. M. Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal,* Vol. II, Imam Muhammad Islamic University, Riaydh, 1988, chapter VII.

[2] Bengal Education Proceedings, 20 September, 1855, no. 80a; also *Parliamentary Papers,* House of Commons, 1859, Session II, Paper 186, p. 91.

These views of Lees and the Muslims' opposition were of no avail against the government's policy of secularizing the Madrasa and the whole structure of the education system. It was in this atmosphere that William Muir's work on the life of the Prophet appeared in 1858-60. As noted earlier, he stated that the Prophet gave vent to his ideas in "wild rhapsodical language, enforced often with incoherent oaths", in "fragments" of poetry and "soliloquy", couched "in words of rare force and beauty."[1] And this view of the Qur'ânic *waḥy* was reiterated shortly afterwards by Nöldeke who held that the Prophet gave out "not only the results of imaginative and emotional excitement, but also many expositions or decrees which were the outcome of cool calculation, as the word of God."[2] Regarding the style and language, however, Nöldeke struck a different note from that of Muir.

II. NÖLDEKE'S VIEWS ON THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR'ÂN

"In point of style, and artistic effect", states Nöldeke, "the different parts of the Koran are of very unequal value". While the older pieces, according to him, are marked by "a wild force of passion, and a vigorous, if not rich, imagination", the "greater part of the Koran is decidedly prosaic; much of it indeed is stiff in style." With "such a variety of material", continues Nöldeke, "we cannot expect every part to be equally vivacious, or imaginative, or poetic... But Muhammad's mistake consists in persistent and slavish adherence to the semipoetic form which he had at first adopted in accordance with his own taste and that of his hearers. For instance, he employs rhyme in dealing with the most prosaic subjects, and thus produces the disagreeable effect of incongruity between style and matter."[3] Nöldeke further observes that though "scraps of poetical phraseology" are numerous in the earlier *sûrahs*, the Prophet was no "poetic genius". "Hence the style of the Koran is not poetical but rhetorical; ... The Koran is never metrical, and only a few exceptionally eloquent portions fall into a sort of spontaneous rhythm. **On the other hand, the rhyme is regularly maintained, although, specially in the later pieces, after a very slovenly fashion. Rhymed prose was a favourite form of composition among the Arabs of that day, and Muhammad adopted it.**"[4] For the sake of maintaining the rhyme, Nöldeke continues, Muhammad calls Mount Sinai *Sinin* at 95:2, Elijah (Ilyas) as *Ilyasin* at

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[1] Muir, *Life etc.*, 3rd edition, p. 39. See also *supra*, p.

[2] Nöldeke's essay on the Qur'ân (Koran) in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edn., vol. 16, 1891, reproduced in Ibn Warraq, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 45. The highlighting of certain lines is by the present writer.

37:130, fixes "the unusual number of angels round the throne of God" as eight, *thamâniyah* (69:17), because it falls in with the rhyme, and speaks of two gardens (*jannatân*), two fountains (*'aynân*) and two kinds of fruits (*zawjân*) in *sûrah* 55 "simply because the dual termination (*an*) corresponds to the syllable that controls the rhyme in that whole sura." In the later pieces the Prophet is also said to have inserted "edifying remarks, entirely out of keeping with the context, merely to complete his rhyme". Nöldeke then concludes these remarks by saying: "In Arabic it is such an easy thing to accumulate masses of words with the same termination, that **the gross negligence of the rhyme in the Koran** is doubly remarkable. One may say that this is another mark of the Prophet's want of mental training, and incapacity for introspective criticism."[1]

Now, it is indeed "doubly remarkable" that Nöldeke is so conspicuously inconsistent in his statements here; for he has been emphasizing in his whole paragraph that the Prophet's predominant aim was to maintain the rhyme, even after a "slovenly fashion" in the "later pieces" of the Qur'ân, and then ends up by saying that because in Arabic it was easy to accumulate masses of words with the same termination, "the gross negligence of the rhyme in the Koran" is indicative of the Prophet's lack of "mental training" and capacity "for introspective criticism." One wonders if the description is not more appropriately applicable to Nöldeke himself. In fact he commits a series of inconsistencies but fails to see them. Thus he says, as noted above, that **rhymed prose** was a favourite form of composition among the Arabs of that day and the Prophet adopted it; then, in the very following paragraph of his essay Nöldeke tells his readers that "a prose style did not exist" among the Arabs at that time, that Muḥammad's "book", i. e., the Qur'ân, "is the first prose work", and hence it "testifies to the awkwardness of the beginner"[2], i. e., the semipoetic nature of the composition. Thus would Nöldeke want his readers to take from him in the same breath that "rhymed prose" was the order of the day; but no, "a prose style did not exist"; that the Prophet adopted the existing rhymed prose style; but no, his was the "first prose work"; that the Prophet regularly maintained the rhyme in the Qur'ân; but no, there is "gross negligence of the rhyme in the Koran." Again, Nöldeke states that the Prophet was no poetic genius and notes that he disclaimed the epithet of "poet" given him by his community, yet it is stated that "Muhammad's mistake consists in persistent and slavish adherence to the semipoetic form which he had at first adopted in

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

accordance with his own taste and that of his hearers." A consistent reasoning would have led to the inevitable conclusion that since the Prophet disclaimed being a poet, he would not of have persisted in "slavish adherence to the semipoetic form".

Nöldeke's inconsistent remarks proceed from his fundamental misunderstanding that the Qur'ân is the Prophet's own composition. Nöldeke is also wrong in saying that in order to maintain the rhyme the Prophet went out of context or employed unusual expressions. The instances cited by him in this connection do not bear out his contention. Thus he says that the Prophet had recourse to the dual termination *ân* in some *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 55 in order to maintain the rhyme with the refrain (Nöldeke calls it syllable): *fa bi-'ayyi 'âlâ'i rabbikumâ tukadhdhibân* (فبأى ءالاء ربكما تكذبان); but if one goes carefully through the *sûrah* one will find that this is not always the case. Thus its *'âyah* 15 ends with the word *al-nâr* (النار), though it is immediately followed by the refrain in *'âyah* 16. Similarly its *âyahs* 24, 27, 41 and 72 end respectively with the words *al-'a'lâm* (الأعلام); *al-'ikrâm* (الاكرام), *al-'aqdâm* (الأقدام) and *al-khiyâm* (الخيام), though each of them is followed by the same refrain. Again, with regard to 69:17 it is not simply to conform to the rhyme that the Prophet put the number of angels as eight (*thamâniyah*). Nöldeke does not, and cannot, say what should be the correct number and why should the number eight be unusual. If rhyme was the prime consideration, the number *thalâthah* would equally have met the requirement of the rhyme. It is to be noted that the terminating word of *'âyah* 14 of the *sûrah* is *wâhidah* (one). Nor do all the *'âyahs* of the *sûrah* conform to the same or similar rhyme, *ah*. Thus the terminating words of its consecutive *'âyahs* 33, 34, 35 and 36 are respectively *al-'azîm* (العظيم), *al-miskîn* (المسكين), *hamîm* (حميم) and *ghislîn* (غسلين).

Again, it is not at all just for the sake of rhyme that Mount Sinai is called *sînîn* at 95:2; for it follows the first *'âyah* which terminates with the word *zaytûn*. And although the *'âyah* 3 ends with the word *al-'amîn* which rhymes with *sînîn*, it is the former word, *al-'amîn*, which might be said to conform to its previous word in rhyme, not that the first word was chosen to agree with the following word in rhyme. It is also to be noted that the succeeding *'âyahs* 4, 5 and 6 terminate respectively with words very dissimilar in rhyme, namely, *taqwîm* (تقويم), *sâfilîn* (سافلين) and *mamnûn* (ممنون).

Similarly *Ilyâsîn* at 37:130 is not a distortion of the name *Ilyâs* for the sake of rhyme. As the commentators point out, it is another name for Ilyâs; just as *sînîn* is

another name for Mount Sinai which is mentioned in the Qur'ân as simply *Tûr* (52:1) or as *Tûr Sainâ'* (23:23).[1] There is also an opinion that *Ilyâsîn* is the lightened form (*mukhaffafah*) of the plural relative of Ilyâs, meaning his believing followers.[2] For one thing; there was no absolute need for distorting the name of Ilyâs for meeting the requirement of rhyme; for, that requirement could easily have been met by simply adding an adjective like *al-'amîn* to the name *Ilyâs*, without having recourse to the questionable method of distorting his name. Also, in several previous *'âyahs* of the same *sûrah* such distortion is not resorted to for the sake of rhyme. Thus *'âyah* 109 terminates with "Ibrâhîm" but its following *'âyah* terminates with the same word *al-muhsinîn*, which is the terminating word for the *'âyah* 131. Similarly *'âyah* 120 terminates with *Hârûn* and its succeeding one with the same *al-muhsinîn*. It may also be noted that several consecutive *'âyahs* after *'âyah* 130 have very dissimilar terminations. Thus *'âyahs* 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146 and 147 terminate respectively with *ta'qilûna* (تعقلون), *al-mursalîn* (المرسلين), *al-mash-hûn* (المشحون), *al-mudḥaḍîn* (المدحضين), *mulîm* (مليم), *al-musabbiḥîn* (المسبحين), *yub'athûna* (يبعثون), *saqîm* (سقيم), *yaqṭîn* (يقطين) and *yazîdûna* (يزيدون). It may further be pointed out that in none of the instances cited by Nöldeke to support his contention has any departure been made from the theme and context, as he insinuates. The Qur'ânic text has of course its unique rhyme and rhythm, but nowhere is the theme or context sacrificed for the sake of rhyme. Nor is rhyme a constant feature with all the Qur'ânic *sûrahs* or passages. To state on the basis of some ill-understood expressions and phrases that the Prophet committed the mistake of persisting in slavish adherence to semipoetic form and sacrificed context and the continuity of thought, indiscriminately employed an arbitrary figure for the number of angels around God's Throne, and even distorted the name of a Prophet, just for the sake of meeting the requirement of rhyme, is a generalization both rash and wrong.

Besides the above, Nöldeke makes other remarks about the text of the Qur'ân. He says that though "the older pieces" are characterised by a force and vigour of imagination and that in other places also "the style is sometimes lively and impressive", the "greater part of the Koran is decidedly prosaic, much of it is indeed stiff in style." Even "anacolutha" (want of syntactical sequences) are of frequent occurrences.[3] He also thinks that in many *sûrahs* the connections of

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[1] See Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, Pt. 23, pp. 95-96.

[2] See Al-Zajjâj, *Ma'ânî al-Qur'ân wa 'I'râbuhu*, (ed. 'Abd al-Jalîl 'Abduhu Shalbî), vol. IV, Beirût, 1988, p. 312; Abû Ḥayyân al-Andalusî, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥîṭ*, vol. IX, Makka, n. d., pp. 122-123.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

thought are interrupted, there are abrupt changes of subjects and frequent omissions of clauses that "are almost indispensable."[1] As regards the stories of the Prophets, Nöldeke says that links in the sequence of events are omitted" and "nowhere do we find a steady advance in the narration". [2] He further states that the stories of the Prophets "are almost in every case facsimiles of Muhammad himself. They preach exactly like him", and their opponents behave exactly as the unbelieving inhabitants of Mecca. The Koran even goes so far as to make Noah contend against the worship of certain false gods, mentioned by name, who were worshipped by the Arabs of Muhammad's time. In an address put in the mouth of Abraham (xxvi.75 sqq.) the reader quite forgets that it is Abraham, and not Muhammad... who is speaking."[3] As regards the view of the Arab Muslims, "who knew Arabic infinitely better than the most accomplished European Arabist will ever do", that the Qur'ân is "the most perfect model of style and language", Nöldeke considers it startling and a part of their dogma. He also disposes of the challenge of the Qur'ân for anyone to produce even one *sûrah* like those in it by saying that revelations of the kind which the Prophet uttered, "no unbeliever could produce without making himself a laughingstock.... To compose such revelations ... required either a prophet or a shameless impostor. And if such a character appeared after Muhammad, still he could never be anything but an imitator, like the false prophets who arose about the time of his death and afterward."[4]

The way Nöldeke thus disposes of the inimitable nature of the Qur'ânic language and style is indicative only of his prejudice. It is a misleading plea to say that the false prophets who had come forward with their rival compositions were dismissed simply as imitators or impostors without due consideration being given to their compositions. Such was not at all the case. Samples of these compositions are preserved. They were considered by knowledgeable persons to whom these were presented and who rejected them as fakes.[5] It will not require any great knowledge of Arabic to see the absurdity of these compositions. Also, the Qur'ân's challenge was not limited to the time of the Prophet or his immediately succeeding generation. It is open still today; and nothing comparable to the Qur'ân in language and style has ever been advanced. The Arab Muslims

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[3] *Ibid.*, 42.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
[5] See Ibn Kathîr, *Al-Bidâyah wa al-Nihâyah*, Pt. VI, Beirut, 1986, p. 331.

who, by Nöldeke's own admission know Arabic far better than any European Arabist, consider the Qur'ân inimitable not as a matter of dogmatic faith but as a matter of fact and knowledge. But Nöldeke's lack of understanding is all the more clear from what he says about the Prophetic stories. In saying that the previous Prophets are presented as "facsimiles" of Muhammad Nöldeke simply misses the point that the Qur'ân emphasizes the fact that God's message has all along been the same – that of monotheism (*tawḥîd*)– that all the Prophets preached the same message and all of them had to face similar objections and opposition. He is also grossly mistaken in supposing that the false gods, Wadd, Suwâ' and Nasr, mentioned in connection with Nûh's preaching (71:23) were the ones worshipped by the Arabs of Muḥammad's time. It is very clear from the statement put in the mouth of Nûḥ that he is speaking about how his unbelieving people had been clinging to *their* false gods who are named. History and traditions also mention that these were the gods worshipped by Nûḥ's people.[1] Nöldeke simply misunderstands or misinterprets the *'âyah*, besides misunderstanding the nature and purpose of the Prophetic stories in the Qur'ân.

In fact it is this failure to understand the basic and predominant theme of the Qur'ân, the message of *tawḥîd*, that makes Nöldeke also think that there are interruptions in links in the Prophetic stories, sudden changes of subjects or departures from the contexts in other places. The entire Qur'ân, its *sûrahs* and passages all revolve round the basic and predominant theme of monotheism (*tawḥîd*). They either bring home the theme of the absolute unity of Allah (God) as the Creator, Sustainer, Lord and Controller of all created beings and objects, or empahsize the duty to worship Him Alone, to obey His guidance and commands, to conduct individual and collective life according to His directives, or to point out the consequences of disobedience to Him and the rewards for belief in and obedience to Him, to shun all shades of polytheism and worship of created beings, to stress individual responsibility and accountability to Him on the Day of Judgement and the eternity of the life in the hereafter. The Prophetic stories are again and again recalled simply to illustrate the unity and continuity of Allah's message throughout the ages, not to tell stories as such or to amuse, as Nöldeke so naively asserts.[2] His view that the greater part of the Qur'ân is "decidedly prosaic" and "stiff in style" proceeds from the same lack of understanding of the main theme and message of it.

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[1] See Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, pt. XXIX, pp. 98-100.

[2] "Other stories are intended rather for amusement", says Nöldeke. Ibn Warraq, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

As already pointed out, this view of the language and style of the Qur'ân is not shared by all the orientalists, though some of them adopt Nöldeke's view. One of the later orientalists who definitely differs from his view in this regard is Arthur J. Arberry. In the introduction to his *The Koran Interpreted* he describes the Qur'ân as "the supreme classic of Arabic literature" and states: "I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which – apart from the message itself – constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind." He further says that the Qur'ân is "neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both" and that the rhythms "vary sensibly according to the subject-matter."[1] He also draws attention to the basic message and theme of the Qur'ân and points out that in many of its passages it is stated that it is sent down "confirming what was before it", whereby the Torah and the Gospel are meant, "excepting such falsifications as had been introduced into them". "All truth was thus present simultaneously within the Prophet's enraptured soul." If this fact is recognized and remembered, he stresses, the apparently sudden fluctuations of theme and mood which bewilder "critics ambitious to measure" the ocean of Qur'ân's eloquence "with the thimble of pedestrian analysis" will cease to present any difficulty. Each *sura* will then "be seen to be a unity within itself, and the whole Koran will be recognized as a single revelation, self-consistent to the highest degree."[2]

III. The Bell-Watt Extension to Nöldeke's Assumptions: The Theory of Revision

While speaking about what he thinks to be breaks in the connection of thought and abrupt changes in subjects and holding that "many pieces of the long suras have to be severed out as originally independent", Nöldeke at the same time sounds a note of warning saying: " We must be aware of carrying this sifting operation too far – as I now believe myself to have done in my earlier works, and as Sprenger in his great book on Muhammad also sometimes seems to do." He further states that since we can observe "how readily the Koran passes from one subject to another" we "are not at liberty, therefore, in every case where the connection in the Koran is obscure, to say that it is really broken, and set it down as the clumsy patchwork of a later hand."[3] Also, while speaking about the dating

[1] A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted,* The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1983, Introduction, p. x.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

[3] Ibn Warraq, *op.cit.* p. 38.

of the different passages he hints at another possible faulty outcome of such an undertaking and says: "we might indeed endeavour to trace the psychological development of the Prophet by means of the Koran, and arrange its parts accordingly. But in such an undertaking one is apt to take subjective assumptions or mere fancies for established data."[1]

These two hints of Nöldeke, however, appears to have worked just the opposite of what was intended by him. For, many of the subsequent orientalists have taken up these two hints to prove, on the one hand, that each of the Qur'ânic passages which seems to represent to them a unit of thought was in itself originally an independent unit of revelation, and, on the other, that the gradual development in the Prophet's "ideas" may be traced by systematically dating such passages. Even A. J. Arberry, who has otherwise a very favourable opinion about the integrity of the Qur'ânic text and its language style, seems to have been influenced by the view that a passage which contains a supposed unit of thought was originally an independent unit of revelation. Thus in his translation of the Qur'ân he arranges the consecutive *'âyahs* of each *sûrah* in "shorter or longer sequences". "I have striven to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings", says he, "in correspondence with what the Arabic presents, paragraphing the grouped sequences as they seem to form original units of revelation."[2]

In arranging what he calls "grouped sequences" of the *'âyahs* in separate paragraphs Arberry has not of course broken the *sûrahs* or their orders; but it needs to be pointed out that the concept of "original units of revelation" based on what is supposed to be a unit of thought or a specific subject-matter is in itself wrong on two main grounds. First, it goes far beyond the evidence provided by the sources which of course speak of the different *sûrahs* and of even different passages of some *sûrahs* coming down on different "occasions." But it is very clear from the accounts in the sources that many of even the long *sûrahs* were "revealed" in whole at a time and that the passages of long or short *sûrahs* that are mentioned as having been "revealed" at different times did not in fact each deal with one "specific subject" or "thought" as they are conceived by the orientalists. And this brings us to the second fault in their concept. For, in general, their view of breaks in thought or subject matter in the Qur'ânic text is an outcome of their lack of understanding of the predominant theme of the Qur'ân, *tawḥîd*

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[2] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted, op. cit.,* Introduction, p. x.

(monotheism), round which each and every of its passages and *sûrahs* revolves. Thus when a passage gives some account of paradise or hell it does not simply describe a beautiful or horrible place but in fact it draws attention to the duty of obeying Allah and the consequences of doing so or not doing so. Or, if a description of paradise or hell is immediately followed by a description of the power and bounties of Allah as Creator and Lord, the purpose is to bring home the theme of monotheism and the duty to believe in Him and His message of the life in the hereafter; for if there is no belief in Him there cannot be any belief in the hereafter. Again, if a passage describes the sufferings of a group of believing people in the past, such as the "inmates of the Cave", it does not simply tell a tale so that one should expect all the details, the climax and anti-climax of the story. It brings in the narrative to illustrate how some people bore all sufferings for the sake of their faith in One Alone God and to encourage such believers to persevere in their faith in the face of all hazards. It is for the same reason that the struggles of and difficulties encountered by past Prophets and Messengers are referred to, often in short and incisive allusions. In fact, the way the Qur'ân makes references to them shows that the immediate audience to whom these were addressed were very much aware of at least the general outline of the stories of these past prophets and peoples; for, otherwise, this audience would have been quite impervious to its message, which was not at all the case. In fact if one keeps this fact in mind, one would be inclined even to revise the generally held opinion that the Arabs to whom the Qur'ân was delivered were a sort of people not knowledgeable and isolated in their own surroundings.

Of those who have built upon and exaggerated Nöldeke's assumptions, disregarding his notes of warning, the most remarkable are Richard Bell and his pupil W. Montgomery Watt. They have not only carried to the extreme the dating of the Qur'ânic passages on the basis of what is supposed to be the unity of subject and thought, and traced what is supposed to be the gradual evolution of the Prophet's ideas and of Islam, but have even propounded a theory of revision of the Qur'ân texts from time to time by the Prophet.

Working on the two basic but erroneous assumptions that (a) the normal unit of revelation was a short passage and (b) that the Prophet "revised" the texts before combining them into *sûrahs*, Bell classifies the Qur'ânic passages into various types, calling them the "sign" type, the "slogan" type, the "soothsayer" type, etc.[1] Such classification of the text of the Qur'ân only betrays Bell's lack of

proper understanding of it. So far as his dating of the Qur'ânic passages is concerned it is as conjectural and untenable as Nöldeke's and is similarly not acceptable to the other orientalists. As regards his "hypothesis" of "revision" of the Qur'ân he makes a number of assumptions that are further enlarged by his pupil M. Watt. In doing so the latter adopts three lines of argument. First, he refers to the Muslims' concept of *naskh* or abrogation and cites a number of Qur'ânic passages that he thinks point to the subject of *naskh* and "the possibility of revision."[2] Second, he then produces what he considers to be "evidences of revision and alteration" found in the Qur'ân;[3] and third, he presents "Bell's hypothesis of written documents" in support of the theory of revision.[4] The following is a brief analysis of these arguments.

(i) *On the concept of naskh and Watt's theory of possibility of revision*

As regards the point about *naskh* (abrogation) Watt cites in the first instance a total of 7 Qur'ânic passages, namely, 87:6-7 (*al-'A'lâ*); 2:106 (*al-Baqarah*); 18:24 (*al-Kahf*); 13:39 (*al-Ra'd*); 16:101(*al-Naḥl*); 17:41 and 17:86 (*al-'Isrâ'*). The first three passages, he says, indicate that Allah may cause the Prophet "to forget some verses; but if he does so, he will reveal other verses in their place."[5] It should be pointed out that the first of this series of three passages asks the Prophet not to move his tongue quickly in order to grasp what is conveyed to him of *waḥy,* assuring him that Allah will make him recite and he will not forget anything, "except what He wills". This last clause, though it might be stretched to include the concept of *naskh,* is not meant to say that Allah will make the Prophet forget some of the "verses" revealed to him but really to emphasize that the power of making the Prophet remember or forget anything belongs solely to Allah. The second passage of course relates to the concept of *naskh*, but Watt's rendering of it is "tendentially shaped"; for he translates it as: "For whatever verse we cancel or cause (the messenger) to forget we bring a better or the like of it." The insertion of "the messenger" in parenthesis is not called for; nor is the word "For" at the beginning at all appropriate. Also, the rendering of the word *'âyah* as "verse" is not quite correct. It has a generic sense here and means "revelation" or "sign". The *'âyah* starts with *mâ* meaning "whatever" and not "for", as Watt renders it. The

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[1] See W. M. Watt (ed), *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, Edinburgh University Press, 1970, pp. 69-84.
[2] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.,* pp. 86-88.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp.89-101.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 101-107.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

'âyah runs as : ما ننسخ من ءايت أو ننسها نأت بخير منها أو مثلها , and its correct translation is: "Whatever We abrogate of a revelation or make it forgotten, We bring something better than it or its like." There is no need here to insert the word (messenger) in parenthesis and thus restrict its meaning. The *'âyah* is general in nature and it may mean either the replacement of the revelation to a previous Prophet by that to a later Prophet or the modification of a previously prescribed rule by a subsequent rule revealed to the same Prophet. In fact the first meaning is more appropriate here; for the *'âyah* is a follow-on to its previous *'âyah* 105 which speaks of the unbelieving Jews' and polytheists' dislike of any "god" (*khayr*), i. e., revelation, coming to the Prophet Muhammad (p. b. h.).

As regards the third passage, 18:24, Watt himself recognizes that "it could also refer to the forgetting of matters other than revelations".[1] In fact it has no relation with the theme of *naskh* and refers to other things than revelations. The fourth (13:19) and fifth (16:101) passages are of course relevant to the concept of *naskh*; but the sixth (17:41) and seventh (17:86) are not relevant to it. In fact Watt grossly misinterprets the fifth passage, translating its key-word *ṣarrafna* (صرفنا) as "We have made changes". The word does not bear that sense, neither here nor anywhere. In fact, this very word has been used in the Qur'ân at 6 places – 17:41, 17:89, 18:54, 20:113, 25:50 and 46:27 – and in another formulation, *nuṣarrifu*, at 4 places – 6:46, 6:65, 6:105 and 7:58 – and in all these places it means "we explained/elucidated/spelt out" or words to that effect. The word *ṣarrafa* (form II of *ṣarafa*) of course also means to cause to flow, to despatch, to dispose, inflect, to conjugate and the like; but never "to make changes."[2] Watt has simply tampered with the meaning in total disregard of the context of the *'âyah*. Similarly the seventh passage (17:86) does in no way refer to the concept of *naskh* but emphasizes the fact that the sending down of the Qur'ân on the Prophet is a matter of Allah's immense grace on him and that if He willed He could take it away from him. In fact the whole of the passage from *'âyah* 82 to *'âyah* 89 relates to Allah's special favour of sending down the Qur'ân.

Thus, of the seven passages cited by Watt four are irrelevant to the concept of *naskh* and the rest, i. e., 2:106, 13:19 and 16:101, refer either to the abrogation of the previous scriptures by the Qur'ân or the modification of certain earlier rules in the Qur'ân in view of the change of circumstances. As already pointed

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] The word has been used in some eight different senses in the Qur'ân, none in the sense of making changes. See Al-Ḥusain Ibn Muḥammad al-Dâmaghânî, (*Qâmûs al-Qur'ân*, Beirut, 1985, pp 279-280.

out, the first sense, i. e., the abrogation of the previous scriptures, is more appropriate to 2:106. And this is also the case with 16:101; for it contains a reference to the reaction of the unbelievers to the Prophet's recitation of the Qur'ân to them – "they say, you are but a forger!" If the Prophet was giving out a "revised version" of any *'âyah* or passage, their reaction would have been something like : "You say one thing at one time and a different thing at another time". Thus the predominant sense of the three passages is the abrogation of the previous scriptures by the Qur'ân.

Be that as it may, Muslims accept the concept of *naskh* (abrogation); but it is not the same as what the term "revision" implies. As Watt himself recognizes, the concept of *naskh* "is that certain commands to the Muslims in the Qur'ân were only of temporary application, and that when circumstances changed they were abrogated or replaced by others."[1] He further observes that because the earlier commands were the word of God "they continued to be recited as part of the Qur'ân" and that this fact "is a confirmation of the accuracy of the text, since it shows that later textual scholars did not remould it in accordance with their conceptions."[2] Having thus recognized the true implication of the Muslims' concept of *naskh* Watt still insists that the *'âyahs* he has cited show that "some revision of the Qur'ân (as it was publicly proclaimed) took place" and that these *'âyahs* "indicate something more extensive than is contemplated in the doctrine of abrogation."[3] And in support of this latter assertion he cites the Qur'ânic passage 22:52-53 (*al-Ḥajj*) and says that this passage "is usually illustrated by the story of the 'satanic verses' " which was first inserted in *sûrah* 53 (*al-Najm*) and later on expunged. He then further enlarges the supposed implication of the passage and observes: "there is nothing in the passage to prevent something similar having happened in a number of other cases. The underlying principle is that something once proclaimed and recited as part of the Qur'ân came to be regarded as satanic and then no longer regarded as belonging to the Qur'ân."[4]

Thus does Watt ultimately bank upon the old and spurious story of the "satanic verses" to sustain his theory of revision. He harps upon this story also in his works on the life of the Prophet. The spuriousness of the story has been proved by many.[5] Also the passage 22:52-53 has nothing to do with the spurious

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1 Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.,* pp. 87-88.

2 *Ibid.,* pp. 88, 89 (the first sentence on p. 88 and the last sentence of the same page continued to p. 89).

3 *Ibid.* pp. 87, 88 (the last sentence on p. 87 and the second sentence on p. 88).

4 *Ibid.,* p. 88.

5 See M. M. Ali, *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists,* Vol. IB, Madina, 1997, pp. 683-702. See also J. Burton, "Those are the

story of the satanic verses. As 'Abû Ḥayyân al-Andalusî rightly points out, it has reference to the efforts of the previous Prophets to disseminate the truth and the devil's role as opponent of it and the ultimate success of the truth.[1] Watt not only supposes the story to be an established fact but also inflates its supposed implication out of all proportions by saying that "there is nothing in the text of the passage to prevent something similar having happened in a number of other cases." Watt cannot, however, lay his hand on a single instance of "something similar having happened" and that his "number of other cases" are only in the realm of his supposition and imagination. If such supposed number of other cases had ever happened, the Prophet's position would inevitably have been irretrievably compromised and his followers would have simply deserted him and he would not have attained any success in his mission. Watt first attempts to show the "possibility" of something having happened; and when he thinks that possibility to have been illustrated, he assumes, without any evidence whatsoever, that that something had actually happened. He conveniently disregards the distinction between the "possibility" of something happening and the "fact" of its having actually happened. Thus having presented the possibility of revision and his assumption that some revision of the Qur'ân had taken place, he proceeds to present what he considers to be the "evidences of revision and alteration" in the text of the Qur'ân.

(ii) *On Watt's supposed evidences of revision and alteration*

The argument that Watt invokes in respect of his "evidences of revision" consists of two points. First, he emphasizes that the Prophet himself put together the various units of revelation to make up the *sûrahs* and that "this process was continuous with his receiving of revelations."[2] Then he says, second, that when this work of putting together of the pieces was done, "some adaptation took place",[3] mainly for streamlining the rhymes. He produces a number of passages to illustrate this supposed adaptation.

In support of the first point Watt, besides citing 75:17, mentions (a) that when the Prophet's opponents were challenged to produce a *sûrah* (10:38) or ten *sûrahs* (11:13) like what had been revealed to him he was in possession of at least ten *sûrahs*; (b) that the grouping of some *sûrahs* by the disjointed letters at their

High-Flying Cranes", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 15, n. 2, 1970, pp. 246-265.

[1] 'Abû Ḥayyan (Muḥammad ibn Yûsuf) al-Andalusî, *Tafsîr al-Baḥr al-Muḥîṭ*, vol. VI, second impression, Dâr al-Fikr, Beirut, 1398/1987, pp. 381-382.

[2] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc.*, p. 89.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

beginnings (*sûrahs* 40-46) which could not have been added by later "collectors", indicates that "these groups already existed as groups" in the Prophet's lifetime; and (c) that "the great variation in the length of the suras is hardly accounted for by differences of subjects, rhyme or form – the type of criterion which might have been used by collectors".[1] These are cogent arguments and Watt is very much right in stating that the Prophet himself put together the different pieces to make up the *sûrahs.*

But Watt is very much wrong in his assumption that "some adaptation took place" while the work of putting together was done; and the passages he cites to illustrate his assumption only prove his lack of understanding of the Qur'ân and the forced and inconsistent nature of his reasoning. Thus he says: "It would seem that sometimes, when a passage with one assonance was added to a sura with a different assonance, phrases were added to give it the latter assonance." As an example he cites the passage 23:12-16 (*sûrat al-Mu'minûn*) which runs as follows:

(12) و لقد خلقنا الانسان من سلالة من طين

(13) ثم جعلناه نطفة فى قرار مكين

(14) ثم خلقنا النطفة علقة

فخلقنا العلقة مضغة

فخلقنا المضغة عظاما

فكسونا العظام لحما

ثم أنشأناه خلقا ءاخر

فتبارك الله أحسن الخالقين

(15) ثم انكم بعد ذلك لميتون

(16) ثم انكم يوم القيامة تبعثون

Watt says that the *'âyahs* of this passage each terminates with the rhyme *în* or *ûn* "which is the assonance of the sura as a whole;" but the passage is a later insertion in the *sûrah* because, (a) *'âyah* 14 "is unusually long" and "can be broken up into six short verses", the first five rhyming in *-â*, while the sixth rhymes in *în*, but this "sixth" part "is superfluous to the sense". (b) Therefore, the previous *'âyahs* 12 and 13 should have also rhymed in *â-*, which would be the case if the terminating phrases of the two, *min tîn* and *fî qarâr makîn* are dropped. (c) Then the passage from *'âyahs* 12 to 14 would constitute a group of seven verses rhyming in *-â*, "describing the generation of man as a sign of God's creative

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

power." Watt further states that "the removal of the rhyme-phrases seems to give a better sense"; and it should "be supposed that verses 15 and 16 were added as part of the adaptation of the passage to its place in this sura."[1]

These surmises and assumptions of Watt are all wrong. It needs to be pointed out that the Qur'ân and therefore the Prophet says very emphatically in reply to the allegations or demand of the unbelievers of his community that he did not himself produce the Qur'ân (69:44-47) nor could he alter it of his own accord. He followed and gave out only what was communicated to him (10:15). Watt of course notes these *'âyahs*; but he interprets the latter *'âyah* by saying that the Prophet did not "of his own accord" change any revelation to him but the changes came about "by the initiative of God", i. e., what the Prophet thought to be revelation to him.[2] This interpretation is another formulation of Watt's view about *wahy* as "intellectual" or "imaginative locution" on the Prophet's part. The fault and untenability of that view has been shown earlier. But apart from this, Watt's assumptions are untenable on other grounds.

First, he admits that the rhyme of the passage 23:12-16 (*în* or *-ûn*) is the assonance of the *sûrah* as a whole. Hence, having regard to the assonance and rhyme, this passage ought not to have been considered a revised version inserted into the *sûrah*. Watt's only surmise is that since *'âyah* 14 of the passage is "unusually" long and can as well be broken into "six" short "verses", the passage is not only a later insertion here but also a revised version of another passage with a different assonance. But this surmise, which he appears to take over from his mentor Bell, is not at all tenable; for there are in the Qur'ân many such long *'âyahs* along with and in the midst of relatively short *'âyahs*; and all these *'âyahs* are not later insertions. In fact, Watt's argument can be more appropriately used against his assumption; for if the Prophet revised and adapted the passage in question to the *sûrah*, he could easily have broken the long *'âyah* into a number of short ones to conform to the rest of the *'âyahs*, the more so as Watt himself sees it easy to do so!

But on this surmise alone Watt builds other surmises. Thus he supposes, secondly, that the terminating phrases of *'âyahs* 12 and 13, *min tîn* and *fî qarâr makîn* respectively, are later adaptations, that their removal would result in all the three *'âyahs* 12-14 (Watt's supposed seven verses) rhyming in *â* and that the whole passage would then have a better and clearer sense. He is totally wrong in

[1] *Ibid.*, p.p. 90-91.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

all these assumptions. The word *sûlâlah* in *'âyah* 12, as Watt recognizes, means "extract", "derivative", "progeny", "descendant", "stock" and the like; and to complete the sense it must be followed by "of something/someone". By itself it does not complete the meaning. It is to be noted that the only other place in the Qur'ân, 32:8, where the word is used it is followed by "of a base water" (*mâ' mahîn*). At this latter place the description is of how, after the first creation of man out of "clay" his progeny was multiplied out of the *sulâlah* of a base water, i.e., spermatozoa contained and carried by the "base water". Watt mistakenly assumes that since at 32:8 *sulâlah* means 'semen', this is also the meaning here at 23:12 and there need not be any need to add the phrase *min tîn* here. He is wrong in a number of ways. He overlooks the meaning of *sulâlah,* which is simply an extract, a derivative, or what is drawn out of something, not by itself "semen". Secondly, he fails also to see that if *sulâlah* is interpreted as "semen" the reference will be not to the creation of the first man, which is the intention of *'âyah* 12, it will also result in superfluity, because the following *'âyah* 13 also speaks of "drop", i.e., semen. The superfluity will be all the more glaring because this latter *'âyah* starts with the expression *thumma,* meaning "thereafter". Hence the expression *min tîn* is absolutely necessary for the sake of completeness and clarity of the sense of the *'âyah* 12. Thirdly and more importantly, Watt fails to understand that while at 32:8 the description is simply about the multiplication of the progeny of the first man, the description at 23:12 is about the stages of development of the human embryo in the process of the creation of the progeny of man. And because of this lack of understanding he says that the phrases *min tîn* and *fî qarâr makîn* (womb) at the ends respectively of *'âyahs* 12 and 13 are unnecessary. The omission of these phrases, far from making the sense better and clear, will render it incomplete and incomprehensible; for the stages of development described do not happen independently but in a safe and secure "container", the mother's womb. Hence the expression *fî qarâr makîn* is indispensable here. Fourthly, Watt is also wrong in his statement that the concluding part of *'âyah* 14, *fa tabârak Allahhu 'aḥsan al-khâliqîn* (blessed be God the best of creators) is superfluous. It is not. Because the *'âyah* is emphasizing God's creative power, it is just the befitting and appropriate conclusion of the *'âyah.* The passage in question is not thus at all revised and inserted into the *sûrah.*

Similarly ill-conceived and misinterpreted are the other passages Watt cites as his evidences of revision. Thus the second passage which he cites in this

connection and which he considers "of special interest" is the long passage of *sûrah* 3 (*'Âl 'Imrân*), from its *'âyah* 21 to *'âyah* 190. He says that while the first part of the *sûrah* up to about *'âyah* 20 rhymes in *-â(l)*, as does its last part from *'âyah* 190 to 200, the "large middle section" has the rhyme in *-î(l)*. He further says that of the middle section, *'âyahs* 37 to 41 dealing with Maryam rhyme in *-â(l)*, adding that even *'âyah* 36 would so rhyme if the last word of it, *al-rajîm* were removed. "Thus", he states, "it looks as if a portion with the rhyme *-î(l)* had been inserted into a sura which originally rhymed in *-â(l)* and an attempt made to dovetail the two pieces together."[1]

Now, it is to be noticed that while in the previous instance Watt's main argument is that when an insertion of a passage was made into a *sûrah*, the terminating phrases of the *'âyahs* of that passage were modified so as to rhyme with the rest of the *sûrah*, here his argument is that a change in the rhyme of a certain passage in the *sûrah* is evidence of its having been inserted into that *sûrah*. Clearly Watt fails to see the inconsistency of his approach. He also fails to see the fallacy of his argument; for, if a passage was inserted into a *sûrah* without making any change in the wording of that passage, specially the terminating or rhyming words of its *'âyahs*, it does not constitute any revision at all! Further, he is wrong in his premise that the *sûrah* in question except the supposedly inserted large middle section rhymes in *-â(l)*. Its very second *'âyah* terminates with the rhyme *'ûm* (*qayyûm*), its third *'âyah* with the rhyme *-î (l)* [*injîl*] and its sixth and eighteenth *'âyahs* with the same rhyme (*ḥakîm*). Similarly, its last *'âyah* terminates with the rhyme *ûn* (*tufliḥûn*). So it is far from correct to say that the *sûrah* has, without the large middle section from *'âyah* 21 to 190, the uniform rhyme of *-â(l)*. Nor is the supposedly inserted middle section characterized by the uniform rhyme of *-î(l)*. Thus *'âyahs* 65-66, 69-72, 75, 78-80, 83-84, 88, 90, 98-99, 102-104, 106-107, 109-113, 116-119, 122-123, 128, 130, 132, 135, 140, 153-154, 157-158, 160-161, 163, 167, 169-170 and 185-187 all terminate in the rhyme *ûn/ûr*. It is strange that Watt appears to assume that his readers would not be conversant with the original text of the Qur'ân and would therefore take from him whatever he says about it! But his worst fallacy is the assumption, based of course on the views of his predecessors like Nöldeke, that the Qur'ân is some sort of a poetical work and that each poetical piece should have one and a uniform rhyme. It is overlooked

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

that even a short poetical piece does have a variety of rhymes. In fact such variety is its beauty and naturalness.[1]

It is not necessary to analyse the other passages cited by Watt to illustrate his view. Suffices it to say that they are all characterized by similar fallacies and misinterpretations. Besides the above mentioned line of argument, however, Watt musters other grounds for the theory of revision, particularly what he and his mentor conceive to be "unevenness in the style" of the language which is claimed to be the "fundamental evidence for revision." He spells out this "fundamental evidence" as: (a) " abrupt changes of rhyme"; (b) "repetition of the rhyme-word or rhyme-phrase in adjoining verses"; (c) introduction of "an extraneous subject into a passage otherwise homogeneous"; (d) "differing treatment of the same subject in neighbouring verses, often with repetition of words and phrases"; (e) breaks in grammatical construction; (f) "abrupt changes in the length of verses"; (g) "sudden changes in the dramatic situation, with changes of pronoun from singular to plural, from second to third person, and so on"; (h) the juxtaposition of apparently contrary statements and (i) "the juxtaposition of passages of different date, with the intrusion of late phrases into early verses." These features are so common, further states Watt, that they are generally regarded as characteristics of the Qur'ân's style; but they are "most simply explained by supposing a measure of revision and alteration..."[2]

No. These features, which are rather imaginary and conjectural, cannot be "simply explained by supposing a measure of revision". In fact, nothing historical can or should be "simply explained" by *supposition and surmises.* It needs to be pointed that even if the features mentioned are admitted for argument's sake as a correct assessment of the Qur'ânic text, they, far from indicating any measure of revision, only prove the fact acknowledged even by Watt that many of the passages revealed at different times were put together *as they were* to form *sûrahs.* In other words, the features mentioned are overwhelmingly indicative of the lack of any revision, alteration or modification.

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[1] The commonest instance is the famous and popular childhood poem:

Twinkle twinkle little star.
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high'
Like a diamond in the sky.
** ** **
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle twinkle all the night.

[2] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.*, p. 93.

As an instance of this so-called "fundamental evidence of revision" Watt mentions that glosses are a common feature of ancient Greek, Latin and other manuscripts and then states: "While it is doubtful if the Qur'ân contains any glosses in the strict sense, there is something approaching a gloss in 2:85." It is noteworthy that this very sentence is an illustration of the "juxtaposition of apparently contrary statements" characteristic of both Bell and Watt but they very conveniently and wrongly ascribe this feature to the Qur'ân. As regards the "something approaching a gloss in 2:85 [2:84-85]" Watt quotes in his translation the *'âyahs* and then observes: "The clause about ransoming prisoners seems an intrusion here... If this clause is removed, the following clause, ... 'although it is forbidden to you' is perfectly clear without the addition of 'their expulsion', ... There is thus a strong presumption that 'their expulsion' is a gloss or addition, made after the clause about ransoming prisoners had been intruded."[1]

How grossly Watt has misconceived and misinterpreted the passage in question will be clear if it is quoted in original and translated properly. The passage runs as:

(84) و اذ أخذنا ميثاقكم لا تسفكون دمآئكم و لا تخرجون أنفسكم من دياركم ثم أقررتم و أنتم تشهدون
(85) ثم أنتم ىءهؤلاء تقتلون أنفسكم و تخرجون فريقا منكم من ديارهم تظاهرون عليهم بالاثم والعدوان
و ان يأتوكم أسارى تفادوهم و هو محرم عليكم اخراجهم أفتومنون ببعض الكتاب و تكفرون ببعض ...

(84) "And [recall[when We took your covenant – you will not shed the blood of yourselves nor will drive out yourselves from your homes; then you confirmed it and you were testifying.

(85) Yet, you are the ones, killing yourselves and driving out a group of you from their homes, backing up against them in offence and enmity; and if they come to you as captives you ransom them, while it was prohibited for you their expulsion. Do you then believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part?..."

This passage speaks of the inconsistent conduct of the Madinan Jewish tribes who took opposite sides in the wars between the then two polytheist tribes of Aws and Khazraj, thus fighting against and killing their (the Jews') own people contrary to the injunctions of the Torah. But when the war ended and they found their people as prisoners of war they ransomed them irrespective of tribal affiliations as required by the teachings of the Torah. They are therefore asked whether they believe in part of the Torah and disbelieve in part of it.[2] Watt misunderstands the clause "and if they come to you as captives you ransom them" as a new provision intruded here, and translates it as: "and if they come to you as

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
[2] See Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, pt. I., pp. 396-397.

prisoners, you shall ransom them." The clause is neither a command nor a provision intruded here. It simply refers to what the Jews used to do. And since Watt misunderstands the clause he concludes that the following statement, "while it is forbidden for you their expulsion", is an attempt to remove the ambiguity created by the intrusion of the previous "provision" (clause) and is thus a gloss on the original text. In any case, Watt does not pause to think that if any person is capable of revising and does revise any particular statement or sentence, he will not introduce in it any new provision or clause making the text more complicated and adding a gloss at the end in an attempt to remove the unnecessary complication. He will simply introduce the new provision or clause as an independent statement. Thus the argument which Watt adduces in fact rebounds on himself and dislodges what he himself describes as only a "presumption". He similarly misconceives and misconstrues the other passages to which he refers in this connection.

Another plea which he advances is that clauses following the expression: "And what will make you understand (*wa mâ 'adrâka*) what.... is?" are added as explanations of unusual words or phrases. "It is clear", he stresses, "that some of the descriptions have been added at a later time, since they do not correspond to the sense in which the word or phrase was originally taken."[1] As the "most striking case" in point Watt cites 101:9-11 and says that the word *hâwiyah* in *'âyah* 9 "presumably meant 'childless' owing to the death or misfortune of her [the mother's] son; but the addition suggests that it is the name of a Hell."[2]

Watt is very much wrong in thus stating the purpose of the expression *wa mâ 'adrâka* and pressing it as an evidence of "revision". The purpose of the expression is mainly to put emphasis on and draw attention to the subject mentioned. It occurs 13 times (not 12 times as Watt says)[3] in the Qur'ân; and out of these at 7 places it does not come after any unusual word or phrase at all.[4] That the purpose of the expression is to put emphasis is very clear from the first instance of its occurrence in the Qur'ân, at 69:3, where it comes in the following sequence: "The inevitable (*al-ḥâqqah*). What is the inevitable? And what makes you realise (*wa-mâ 'adrâka*) what the inevitable is?" (69:1-3). Now, if the intention was

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[1] Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

[3] See 69:3, 74:27, 77:14, 82:17, 82:18, 83:8, 83:19, 86:3, 90:12, 97:2, 101:3, 10:110 and 104:5.

[4] These words are: *al-ḥâqqah* (the inevitable - 69:3), *yawm al-faṣl* (the day of sorting out - 77:14), *yawm al-dîn* (the day of requital [twice] - 72:17,18), *al-'aqabah* (the obstacle, hurdle, steep road - 90:12), *laylat al-qadr* (the night of grade,divine decree - 97:3) and *al-qâri'ah* (that which hits, disaster - 101:3).

to explain the term *'al-ḥâqqah*, there was no need to bring in the expression *wa mâ'adrâka* here at all; for the explanation could have been given immediately after the interrogative: "What is the inevitable?" More importantly, no explanation of the term *al-ḥâqqah* follows the query *wa mâ 'adrâka etc.* On the other hand the immediately following *'âyahs* describe the fates of the 'Âd and the Thamûd peoples because of their disbelieve in *al-qâriah* (the disaster). One might think this to be an abrupt change of subject. But that is not at all the case. After having drawn the attention of the reader/listener to *al-ḥâqqah* and making him aware of its importance, mention is made of the fates of two most prominent nations because of their disbelief in it.

Specially noteworthy is the expression *al-qâri'ah* used here to refer to *al-ḥâqqah.* But this word *al-qâri'ah* is not explained here, nor at 13:31 (*al-Ra'd*) where it first occurs in the Qur'ân. Whereas in *sûrah* 101 (*al-Qâri'ah*) it occurs in its very first *'âyah;* and the second *'âyah* is an introductory interrogative like that in 69:2, i. e., "What is *al-qâri'ah?*"; followed in the third *'âyah* by the expression: *wa mâ 'adrâka mâ al-qâri'ah* (what makes you realize what *al-qâri'ah* is?). As in the case of *sûrah* 69, here also the purpose of this latter expression is to emphasize and draw attention to the subject, not really to explain the term; for the explanation could have been given immediately after the second *'âyah*: "What is *al-qâri'ah?*". Such purpose of emphasis is clear at the 5 other places where the expression comes after no unusual or difficult word or phrase.

At the remaining 6 places (74:27, 83:87, 83:19, 86:2, 101:10 and 104:5) the expression is intended for *both emphasis and elucidation*; but the elucidatory *'âyahs* that follow are not *later additions* at any of these places. For, not only is there no report or evidence suggesting that these were later additions or revelations, even the criterion adopted by Watt is not applicable in these cases. Watt says that the additions "do not correspond to the sense in which the word or phrase was originally taken." Such is not the case at any of the places. In fact his mistake lies in this assumption of non-correspondence of the original sense of the word or phrase with that of the elucidatory description. And this mistake is most obvious in respect of 101:10-11 which he cites as his "most striking case". Here he ignores the context which is the description of the destiny of those whose balance of good deeds will be heavy or light. *'Âyahs* 6 and 7 state that the one whose balance will be heavy will have a pleasant life (in the hereafter). Then *'âyahs* 8 and 9 say that the one whose balance will be light, "his mother will be *hâwiyah.*" Evidently

this phrase has a sense opposite to the destiny of the doer of good deeds. Watt ignores the context and takes the word *'umm* in its literal and physical sense of "mother" and the word *hâwiyah* to mean "childless". The two words of course mean "mother" and "childless"; but they have other meanings as well. Thus the word *'umm* has been used in at least five senses in the Qur'ân, including "origin", head or principal, place of return/ refuge, destination.[1] Even in English "mother" has a variety meanings other than female parent, such as "origin", "quality or condition that gives rise to something", and, as verb, to take care of, to protect, etc.[2] Similarly the word *hâwiyah* means chasm, abyss, gulf, bottomless pit, hell, besides "childless". The exact meanings of *'umm* and *hâwiyah* at any given statement have therefore to be determined by the theme and context. If Watt had done so, he would have found no inconsistency between the original sense of the expression: *fa 'ummuhu hâwiyah* (then his destination/place of resort will be *hâwiyah*) and the explanatory clause: *nâr hâmiyah* (a fire/hell extremely scorching). Even when a person is fallen or ruined the Arabs customarily refer to his position as "his mother has lost him" (*hawat 'ummuhu* هوت أمه).[3] This is an idiom. So whether taken as an idiom or in the accepted senses of the words, there is no inconsistency between the meanings of the original expression and the explanatory clause. The "mother" of Watt's fault is his implicit assumption that while "authoring" the Qur'ân Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was inept enough to describe something by an inappropriate or unusual expression and heedless enough to give it subsequently a strange meaning! No confusion and misconception could have been more pitiable.

Such unreasonableness and absurdities characterise Watt's statements in connection with the other passages he cites as evidences of revision. In fact the Bell-Watt fallacies in this regard may be grouped under the following heads: (a) *Inconsistent suggestions in respect of rhymes* (b) *Incomprehension of theme and context*; (c) *sheer assumption and misinterpretation,* (d) *Abuse of the fact of the coming of revelations in instalments*; and (e) *Perversion of the concept of naskh.*

Watt's misinterpretation of the concept of *naskh* has already been noted. Some instances of the fallacies under the other four heads are noted below.

(a) *Inconsistent suggestions in respect of rhymes:* Thus, in respect of some of the passage it is argued that it indicates a change of subject, so it must have been

[1] See Majd al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qûb al-Fîrûzâbâdî, *Baṣâ'ir dhawî al-tamyîz fî laṭâ'if al-Kitâb al-'Azîz*, vol. II, Beirut, n.d., pp. 111-112; Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dâmaghânî, *Qâmûs al-Qur'ân*, Beirut, 1985, pp. 41-42.

[2] See A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford, 1974, p. 551.

[3] See Al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, Pt. 30, p. 282; Abû Ḥayyân al-Andalusî, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥîṭ*, Vol. 10, Makka, n. d., p. 533.

inserted later in its place simply because it conforms in rhyme to that of the rest of the *sûrah*. While in respect of some other passage it is argued that it is a later insertion there because it differs in rhyme . Thus in one breath the reader is told that the supposed "author's" overriding consideration was the keeping of the rhyme uniform in the *sûrah*; and in another breath the reader is required to believe that the "author" was careless about rhyme and even subject matter while making the alleged revision! Some instances of this type of inconsistent reasoning have been noted earlier. A few others may be mentioned here by way of illustration. Thus in respect of *sûrah* 91 (*al-Shams*) Watt says that its *'âyahs* 11-15 are a later insertion, either "to illustrate the moral" or simply "because of the similar rhyme". Then in respect of *sûrah* 88 (*al-Ghâshiyah*) he states that its *'âyahs* 6 and 7 are a later insertion because they have a different rhyme.[1] Similarly he states that *'âyahs* 34-40 of *sûrah* 19 (*Maryam*) is a later addition because this passage has a different rhyme from that of the *'âyahs* preceding and following it.[2] Again Watt supposes that *'âyahs* 34-37 of *sûrahh* 80 (*'Abasa*) is a later insertion because the rhyme of this passage differs from what precedes and follows it.[3] He completely disregards the fact that these *'âyahs* are a natural sequence to *'âyah* 34 and describe what will happen after the event mentioned in the latter. Inconsistently enough, after having mentioned the above passage as an evidence of revision because of its different assonance, Watt immediately cites 2:102-103 (*al-Baqarah*) as another revision because they both end in the same rhyme![4]

(b) *Incomprehension of theme and context*: Often a "change of subject" or "break in the connection of thought" is assumed in respect of a passage because of lack of understanding of the theme and context and it is supposed to be a "later insertion" in its place. Thus Watt says that *'âyahs* 33 and 34 of *sûrah* 78 (*al-Nabâ'*) are a later insertion there because of the break of the "connection between verses 32 and 35."[5] The whole section from *'âyas* 31 to 36 describes the rewards awaiting the righteous in the hereafter and there is no break of connection or theme in these *'âyahs*. Watt simply fails to understand the theme here. Again he says that *'âyah* 16 of *sûrah* 87 (*al-'A'lâ*) is a later insertion here because it constitutes "a sudden change in the dramatic situation".[6] *'Âyahs* 12 to 15 describe the

[1] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.*, p. 95.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*p. 95.
[6] *Ibid.*

contrasting positions in the hereafter respectively of the rejecters of the message and those who accept it and purify themselves. Then *'âyah*s 16 and 17 very appropriately remind the reader/listener of his preferment of and engrossment with the "life in this world; though the hereafter is better and more lasting." There is no "sudden change in the dramatic situation" here. The supposed change exists only in the lack of understanding of the passage as a whole.

Similarly based on a lack of understanding of the theme and context is the statement that some of the "reservations introduced by *illâ* are later additions. As cases in point Watt specially mentions *'âyah* 7 of *sûrah* 87 (*al-'A'lâ*) and *'âyah* 6 of *sûrah* 95 (*al-Tîn*), adding that the latter instance "*illâ* introduces a longer verse, which has characteristic Madinan phraseology".[1] As regards the first mentioned *'âyah,* 87:7, it may be recalled that earlier in his discussion Watt cites it as evidence for his assumption that the Prophet did forget some of the revelations,[2] and now he cites the same *'âyah* as evidence of the Prophet's having introduced it later on. As pointed out earlier, the *'âyah* in question does not show in any way that the Prophet forgot some of the revelations. It is a natural follow-on to its immediately preceding *'âyah* and it reminds the Prophet that to enable him to remember what is revealed to him or make him forget it is Allah's will and grace so that he should not worry about remembering the revelations made to him. In fact the *'âyah* is an assurance that he shall not forget anything. Watt simply fails to understand this theme and context, or misinterprets the *'âyah* for his purpose.

As regards the second *'âyah*, 95:6, it is neither disproportionately long in comparison with the other *'âyahs* of the *sûrah* nor is its phraseology Madinan. On the contrary it is a natural follow-on to *'âyahs* 4 and 5 which say: "We have indeed created man in the best of form. Then We do revert him to the lowest of the low". The implication is that this will be the position of those who do not believe and commit sins. This implication is made very clear in the exception made in *'âyah* 6 which points out that such shall not be the position of those who believe and do good deeds, for whom shall indeed be incessant rewards. If this latter *'âyah* is removed, *'âyah* 5 will mean that Allah will revert all mankind to the lowest of the low position without any exception, which is not only inconsistent with the concept of divine justice but also with *'âyah* 7 which makes a call to believe in judgement and recompense. Watt grossly misunderstands or misconstrues the

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] See *supra*, p.

entire passage from *'âyahs* 4-8 and arbitrarily assumes that the *'âyah* 6 is a later insertion.

The same lack of understanding underlies his statement that the passages introduced by *ḥattâ 'idhâ* after 23:63 (*sûrat al-Mu'minûn*) till 23:98 are later and alternative continuations.[1]

Another instance of such lack of understanding is Watt's citing of *'âyahs* 135 and 136 of *sûrah* 3 (*'Âl 'Imrân*) as a later insertion because, according to him, they constitute a repetition of what is said in the previous two *'âyahs* 133 and 134.[2] This is not at all so. *'Âyah* 133 calls upon to be prompt in seeking Allah's forgiveness; *'âyah* 134 encourages charity, patience in prosperity and adversity and forbearance towards fellow-beings; *'âyah* 135 speaks of those who, after having committed an abominable act or wrong, hastens to seek Allah's forgiveness and do not persist in committing the sins; and *'âyah* 136 points out that such people, i. e., those who meet the criteria mentioned in the previous three *'âyahs*, shall have Allah's forgiveness and reward. There is no repetition in the last two *'âyahs* of what is said in the previous two *'âyahs.* Watt has simply failed to understand the passage and has drawn his wrong conclusion on the basis of a faulty understanding of it.

Again, Watt cites *'âyahs* 9 and 10 of *sûrah* 22 (*al-Ḥajj*) as a later addition because they "threaten not only future punishment but 'humiliation in this life', a Madinan threat". "The change of tone and attitude shows clearly enough", states Watt, "that these verses did not belong to the original passage."[3] The *'âyahs* in question of course threaten those who do not believe in the resurrection and dispute about Allah without knowledge and guidance, who are mentioned in the previous *'âyah* 8. As such *'âyahs* 9 and 10 are a natural continuation and completion of the theme. There is no change of tone and attitude because of the nature of the threat being "Madinan". Watt simply overlooks the fact that *sûrah* 22 is Madinan!

Another instance of Watt's misunderstanding of the whole theme and context is his citing of 39:70-74 (*sûrat al-Zumar*) as a later insertion because he misconceives its *'âyah* 75 as repeating the scene of Judgement which "is already finished"![4] It is not a repetition of the "scene" of judgement but a conclusion of it reiterating that judgement shall indeed be given rightly and truly.

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[1] Watt, *Bell.s Introduction, etc.,op. cit.*, p. 97.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 96
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

(c) *Sheer assumption and misinterpretation*: Sometimes an *'âyah* or passage is simply misinterpreted and is assumed to be a later insertion in its place. A characteristic instance is Watt's remark in connection with *'âyah* 56 of *sûrah* 74 (*al-Muddaththir*). He says that this *'âyah* limits the freedom of man's choice and "virtually takes back what had been stated in verse 55", and that this "corresponds to the hardening of the doctrine of predestination which took place in Madinan days."[1] The *'âyah* does not limit man's choice nor does it postulate "predestination" and "fatalism". In fact it negatives the view-point of the Qadrites and the Jabrites who deny the existence of man's freedom of choice. This *'âyah,* as well as *'âyah* 30 of *sûrah* 76 (*al-Insân*) speak of Allah's Will (*mashiyah*) and stress that man's acts and intentions take place by His Knowledge and Will, that the receipt of guidance is a great favour from Him and that therefore man should always pray for and seek this favour from Him. That is why the concluding part of the *'âyah* (74:56) stresses that "He is the One to be aware of (*'ahl al-taqwâ*) and He is the One to grant forgiveness (*'ahl al-maghfirah*)." Watt simply misinterprets it. But apart from this misinterpretation, he builds his assumption of "later insertion" in respect of this *'âyah* on another faulty assumption, namely, that the "hardening of the doctrine of predestination ... took place in Madinan days." It needs to be pointed out that while Watt and his mentor Bell attempt to trace the development of the Prophet's ideas by determining the dates of the Qur'ânic passages and *sûrahs*, they in effect first assume something as having taken place at a certain point of time and then imposes that point of time on their chosen passage or *sûrah.* A characteristic example of this is their dating of the passages where mention is made of 'Islâm, Muslims, angels and Jibrîl, all of which they arbitrarily and mistakenly assume to have come to the Prophet's mind and knowledge only at Madina! Be that as it may, the concept of *mashiyat Allah* (Allah's Will), whatever implication Watt puts on it, is contained not only in Madinan passages but also very much in Makkan passages. Watt's guarded phraseology, "hardening of the doctrine of predestination ... in Madinan days" betrays an implicit recognition that it had its origin in Makkan days. The *'âyah* in question was not a later insertion at Madina. Similarly Watt misinterprets and assumes the latter part of 5:41 (*sûrat al-Mâ'idah*) which describes some characteristics of the Madinan Jews as an alternative and later continuation.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.* p. 95.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

The same sheer assumption underlies Watt's citing of *'âyahs* 112-122 of *sûrah* 37 (*al-Ṣâffât*) as a later insertion because the passage contains "a statement about the posterity of Abraham and Isaac".[1] The statement is just in line with the description of the other prophets made before and after this passage. Watt does not give any specific reason why this passage should be regarded in any way incongruous or a later insertion.

(d) *Twisting of the fact of the coming of revelations in instalments*: In respect of many of his so-called evidences for revision Watt implicitly plays upon the acknowledged fact that the Qur'ânic revelations came in instalments over a period of 23 years covering the Makkan and the Madinan period of the Prophet's life. It is also acknowledged by Muslims that some Makkan *sûrahs* contain passages revealed at Madina and *vice versa*.[2] The very first revelation to the Prophet consisted of the first five or so *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 96 (*al-'Âlaq*). The rest of the *sûrah* were later revelations. The joining of a later passage with an earlier passage is thus implicit in the very nature of the Qur'ânic revelations, and such joining of passages of different dates to form a *sûrah* does not *ipso facto* constitute what might be called "revision" of the text. Watt, however, implicitly plays upon this fact in respect of many of his so-called evidences of revision. Two notable instances of such abuse of this historical fact are his citing of the last *'âyah* of *sûrah* 73 (*al-Muzzammil*) and *'âyah* 31 of *sûrah* 74 (*al-Muddaththir*) as his evidences of revision. The first mentioned *'âyah*, which lightens the requirement of optional nightly prayer and recitation of the Qur'ân, was revealed at Madina whereas the rest of the *sûrah* had been revealed earlier at Makka. This is an instance of a Makkî *sûrah* containing a Madanî *'âyah* or passage. That this *'âyah* is *Madanî* is clearly mentioned in the standard commentaries.[3] Similarly it is acknowledged that *'âyah* 31 of *sûrah* 74 (*al-Muddaththir*) was revealed sometime after the revelation of the first part of the *sûrah*, in reply to some of the unbelieving leaders' audacious remark that his supporters would be easily able to overcome the only 19 sentinels of the hell, as mentioned in the previous *'âyah* 29.[4] To mention such passages as "evidences" of revision is clearly a twisting of the fact of the Qur'ânic revelations coming in instalments.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[2] See al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân etc.*, *op. cit.* pp. 41-52.

[3] See for instance *Tafsîr al-Jalâlayn*, Beirut, n. d., p. 773.

[4] Al-Tabarî, *Tafsîr*, pt. 29, p. 160.

It is not necessary to note the other passages cited by Watt as his evidences of revision. Suffice it to say that they all are based on similar misunderstanding, misinterpretation and inconsistent reasoning.

(iii) *On Bell's hypothesis of written documents*

Finally, Watt presents what he call's "Bell's hypothesis of written documents." He introduces this section with the remark that "this part of his [Bell's] view has not met with the same degree of approval."[1] It must at once be pointed out that not only "this part", but the other parts which Watt has so far presented as the evidences of revision are also absurd and untenable. This part, however, is the most absurd so much so that Watt finds it necessary to introduce it with the above mentioned remark. Not only that, he had earlier penned a rather detailed critique of this hypothesis of Bell.[2] In essence Bell's theory is another extension of what is supposed to be a break in the connection of thought or sudden change of subject in the Qur'ânic passages. As noted earlier, Nöldeke had sounded a note of warning against carrying this supposed feature to extremes and regarding every such passage as an independent piece of revelation. But Bell and Watt have not only done just that but have built their entire theory of revision on it.

Bell's "hypothesis of written documents" assumes that not only were parts of the Qur'ân written down "at a fairly early stage in Muhammad's career", but that "the occurrence in the middle of a sura of a passage wholly unrelated to the context" has to be explained "by the supposition that this passage was written on the back" of the material "used for one of the neighbouring passages which properly belonged to the sura."[3] As examples Bell selects 75:16-19, 84:16-19 and 88:17-20; and Watt states that "the argument may be presented most clearly in the case of the latter", i. e., 88:17-20 (*sûrat al-Ghâshiyah*). He quotes in his translation its *'âyahs* 10-21 and then says: "The passage 17-20 has no connection of thought either with what goes before or with what comes after; and it is marked off by its rhyme." If, therefore, it is assumed that this passage has been placed here by a "collector", the question still remains "whether a responsible collector could not have found a more suitable place for it." Therefore Bell's hypothesis is that "the verses 17-20 have been placed here because they were found written on the back of verses 13-16."[4]

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1 Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc.*, p. 101.
2 W. M. Watt, "The dating of the Qur'ân: A review of Richard Bell's theories", *J.R.A.S.*, April, 1957, pp. 46-56.
3 Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.*, p. 101.
4 *Ibid.*

Now, the whole argument revolves round the question of the connection of thought; and here Watt and his mentor Bell commit their worst mistake. Not only is there no break in the connection of thought in respect of these *'âyahs* 17-20, they are the most appropriate and natural here. The previous *'âyahs* describe the inevitability of resurrection, judgement and reward and this is followed by *'âyahs* 17-20 which draw attention to Allah's wonderful Power of Creation; for belief in the hereafter can be brought home only if a belief in Allah and His Power of Creation is forthcoming. The *'âyahs* thus draw the listener's/reader's attention to this fact; and the objects of which the immediate audience, the Arabs, are daily witnesses and most aware, such as the camels, the sky, the mountains, the plains in contrast to the latter, are mentioned by way of bringing home to them the Power of Allah, and, in consequence, in making them believe in Him Alone, His Messenger and in the hereafter. And this is concluded by encouraging the Messenger to persist in his preaching and persuasion – "So remind, you are only one to remind."[1] Such reference to Allah's Power of Creation immediately after a mention of the inevitability of the resurrection and life in the hereafter is made at other places also in the Qur'ân. Thus the first five *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 78 (*al-Nabâ'*) make a reference to the subject of Resurrection and Judgement (*al-Nabâ' al-'aẓîm*) and then the immediately following *'âyahs* 6-16 draw attention to Allah's Power of Creation in respect of the earth, the mountains, the male and female, sleep, day and night, the sky, etc. Bell and Watt fail to grasp this basic theme of the Qur'ân as a whole, namely, the theme of Absolute Unity of Allah, His Power of Creation, which lies at the root of every item of the message and teaching of the Qur'ân, and in consequence misconceive absence of continuity of thought in respect of many of the Qur'ânic passages, even those containing references to the Prophets, expecting the relevant passages to be full-scale stories of such prophets, and jump into making assumptions and suppositions to tide over the difficulties created by their own lack of understanding.

With regard to 75:16-19 (*sûrat al-Qiyâmah*) Watt says that "verses 13-16 ... seem to have been added to 7-12, which deal with the Last Day, and to have been written on the back of the early 'scrap' containing 16-19."[2] This statement is somewhat confusing; for he mentions *'âyah* 16 as having been written on both sides of the material. Obviously he means 13-15 instead of 13-16. This latter passage is of course an address specially directed to the Prophet as a parenthesis

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[1] It is noteworthy that Watt is wrong in translating this *'âyah* as: "So warn. You are only a warner." (*ibid.*,p. 102).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

along with the description of the resurrection and it is also a very early piece of revelation as Watt admits. But his or rather Bell's supposition that the passage 7-12 was a "later" addition and was written on the back of the "early 'scrap' containing 16-19" is wrong; for the passage 7-12 is a natural continuation of the description of the Day of Resurrection contained in *'âyahs* 1-6; and it requires to be explained how then the *'âyahs* 1-6 were before the *'âyahs* 7-12. The supposition of the passage 7-12 being a later addition is thus totally groundless.

Similarly the supposition that the passage 84:16-19 (*sûrat al-Inshiqâq*) was a later addition to the *'âyahs* 7-12 because the former "destroy the balance" of the latter piece[1] is completely wrong. The *'âyahs* 16-19 are an emphatic reiteration of the inevitability of the resurrection and judgement mentioned in the previous *'âyahs* 7-12.

It is not necessary to take up the other passages mentioned by Watt to support the "hypothesis" and "supposition" of the Qur'ânic passages having been written indiscriminately on both sides of the same material without any care being taken about the theme and context and then these being mixed up by the "collector". Suffice it to say that the same lack of understanding and confusion vitiate their logic and conclusion. Apart from that, however, some very fundamental faults of the hypothesis may be mentioned. In the first place, its runs counter to the other supposition made earlier by Watt that the Prophet, while combining the separately revealed passages into *sûrahs*, made "adaptations". A proper historical and consistent approach demands the determination of the extent of the work done in this respect by the Prophet and what, if at all, was left uncombined and uncoordinated. But neither Bell nor his pupil Watt attempt do anything in that direction. Instead, they appear to make one supposition upon another without caring to see that some of these conjectures run counter to the others.

Second, the hypothesis requires us to believe that the Prophet, who is depicted by the orientalists themselves, including Bell and Watt, as a careful planner in respect of his mission and career, and whose main concern was the giving out of the revelations which constituted his only claim to Prophethood and to the obedience of his followers, was careless enough to write down the revelations on the back of materials that already had earlier revelations written on "another side" without any regard to theme and context and without any indication of where

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[1] *Ibid.*

these supposedly new writings should belong. This is preposterously against reason and the nature of his mission and career.

Third, Bell and Watt, while arguing that the supposed "collector" so placed an irrelevant passage in a *sûrah*, disregard the fact that the revelations were not simply written down on suitable objects but were simultaneously given out to the public and were committed to memory by the Prophet himself and many of his companions. Specially noteworthy is the fact that the main passages cited by Bell in support of his hypothesis all belong to the group of short and early *sûrahs* which were easy to memorize and were in fact memorized by many including the Prophet and were regularly recited during the prayers. It can therefore by no means be supposed that the passages in question were simply left written down haphazardly and were then collected by his successors as best as they could.

Fourth, accepting for argument's sake that the passages each containing a few *'âyahs* mentioned by Bell and Watt were written down on one sides of the same materials containing on their other sides a few earlier *'âyahs* occupying an equal space, it remains to be explained how the other passages or *'âyahs* of the *surahs* respectively came to be prefixed or suffixed to the supposedly jumbled up passages. Were these other passages and *'âyahs* also written down on some materials? If so, were there any indications of where those passages should belong? And if so, why should the passages supposed to be written on the other sides of the same materials not have any mention of where they were to be placed? If not, why the supposed collector should not have made up independent *sûrahs* of the unidentified passages, instead of pushing them into places where they are supposedly misfit? Bell and Watt do not ask themselves these questions, let alone answering them. Last but not least, Bell and Watt also disregard the established facts about the collection of the Qur'ân in one compilation. As noted earlier, and as Watt also recognizes, this was done by an officially appointed committee consisting of a number of experts. It was not, and could not in the very nature of things, be a matter of discretion for a "collector" to combine the supposedly isolated passages as he thought convenient and proper. It is also to be noted that the Committee were specifically instructed to compare each memorized piece with the written copy and *vice versa*, and they meticulously followed this instruction and did not include anything that did not pass this test. The orientalists, particularly Bell and Watt, do not note this fact and think that something was collected from memory and something was collected

from written copies. This was not at all the case. And it is because of this confusion or wilful disregard of the fact that Watt distorts the report of how Zayd ibn Thâbit collected the last two *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 9 (*al-Tawbah*), saying that he found these two *'âyahs* "when he had almost completed his task of completing the collection of the Qur'ân" and so placed them here "as the most convenient position at the time." This is a gross misinterpretation of the report in question. The report does not say that Zayd found the two *'âyahs* in isolation and placed them at the end of *sûrah* 9 because he thought this to be the most convenient position. As noted earlier, the reports very distinctly say that Zayd knew these concluding *'âyahs* of the *sûrah* by heart, but did not find them with anyone else, i. e., in a written form, except with Abû Khuzaymah al-Anṣârî. With regard to another passage of another *sûrah* he very distinctly says that he heard the Prophet reciting it and thus knew it to be a part of that *sûrah* but did not find it with anyone else except so and so.[1] The reports thus very clearly show that nothing was included in the compilation unless it was found both in the written and memorized form or, as another report says, it was corroborated by two independent witnesses. Bell and Watt not only overlook or sidetrack this important fact but misinterpret the reports in order to sustain their absurd hypothesis. On the whole, the confusion and conjectures of Bell and Watt are simply an extension and exaggeration of the basically mistaken notion propounded by Nöldeke and other earlier orientalists that the Qur'ânic text is a jumble of discordant passages relating to different themes and subjects!

To wind up this discussion, it may be noted that all that Bell and Watt put forward through their laboured argument and conjectures as the "evidences" of revision amounts to nothing more than that some supposedly later passages were added to some earlier passages or that some supposedly irrelevant passages were combined with passages relating to different themes. These are not, strictly speaking, instances of "revision" as such, but are rather pointers to the lack of it; and they can all be best explained in the context of the coming of the Qur'ânic revelations in instalments over a period of more than twenty years. All that Bell and Watt say does not prove the case of "revision" but, on the contrary, goes really to prove that the text of the Qur'ân now in our hands is exactly what the Prophet gave out and left memorized as well as written down.

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1 *Bukhârî*, no. 4988.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE TEXT OF THE QUR'ÂN: II. THE SO-CALLED FOREIGN VOCABULARY AND COPYIST'S ERRORS

I. ON THE NATURALIZED FOREIGN WORDS IN THE QUR'ÂN IN GENERAL

Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century orientalists have turned their attention to what they consider "foreign words" in the Qur'ân. They indeed take their cue from the writings of the Muslim classical scholars and exegetes themselves who, in their eagerness for meticulous studies of all aspects of the Qur'ân, paid attention also to the words and expressions in it that were adopted and naturalized in the Arabic language of words and expressions of non-Arabic origin. Of later scholars Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûṭî (d. 910/1505) prepared an independent monograph on the subject entitled *Al-muhadhdhab fî mâ waqa'a fî al-Qur'ân min al-mu'arrab* (A clear statement of what occurs in the Qur'ân of Arabicized words and expressions) and reproduced a summary of this work in a section of his work on the Qur'ânic Sciences, together with an alphabetical list of such words.[1]

Al-Suyûṭî and others before him emphasize three important facts in this connection. First, Arabic, Ethiopic, Syriac and Aramaic are cognate languages and have a good number of words in common because of their common roots. Second, in the course of the Arabs' long contact with the outside world, especially in the course of their trade and commerce, a number of words of non-Arabic origin entered the language and were naturalized, these being considered part and parcel of the Arabic language. Third, in the course of such adoption and naturalization the forms as well as the original meanings of the words underwent some modifications and changes.

These facts are common in respect of almost all important languages. So far as Arabic is concerned, however, the first mentioned fact may be a little more elaborated. Arabic, Aramaic, Syraic and Hebrew are all Semitic languages and all had the same origin, i. e., the language of the descendants of Sâm, Prophet Nûḥ's son. Sâm's descendants spread all over the region from Abyssinia in the south to Iraq-Syria (including Palestine) in the north. The language of these descendants of Sâm gradually developed local characteristics and crystallized into independent languages. One of the descendants of Sâm was Aram or Iram. The ancestor of

[1] Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân Fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, vol. I, Riyadh, 1407/1987, pp. 366-380.

the two nations, 'Âd and Thamûd, who became very prominent over the entire region, was this Aram. The Qur'ân refers to this fact in connection with a mention of the fate of the 'Âd people: ألم تر كيف فعل ربك بعاد ارم ذات العماد (Do you not realise how your Lord dealt with 'Âd, of Iram, possessing pillars? - Q. 89:6-7). These 'Âd-Thamûd descendants of Aram lived in the region from Yaman to Syria and their language was the original language of this region as a whole. This language was, geographically, the original Arabic, and ethnically the original Aramaic. This original Aramaic is much anterior to and different from the later Aramaic in which the Jewish *Talmûd* was written. The later Arabic language developed out of this original Arabic-Aramaic language. It is because of this fact that all the above mentioned languages have a number of words and expressions in common, though their senses and connotations have undergone changes due to the influences of time and locality. At the time the Qur'ân came down, a number of words of these cognate languages as well as languages of the neighbouring peoples had been naturalized in the Arabic language and were regarded as part and parcel of the standard and literary Arabic (*al-'arabîy al-mubîn*). The occurrence of such words and expressions in the Qur'ân is thus quite natural because it was sent down in the language of its immediate audience, the Arabs.

II. The Orientalists' Fiction of Foreign Vocabulary

As in the case of the other facts, the orientalists have similarly twisted and misinterpreted this fact of the existence of some naturalized Arabic words in the Qur'ân in order to assail it and the Prophet. Broadly, they make four types of insinuation on the basis of this fact. Thus, first, they make personal attacks on the Prophet saying that he was unable to express his ideas in his native tongue and therefore had recourse to these "foreign" words. It is further alleged that he was fond of making a show of his learning by the use of such "uncommon" and "strange" words. Second, it is said that the Qur'ân is not written in "pure" Arabic as is claimed. Third, the existence of these words in the Qur'ân, especially those borrowed from the languages of the Jews and Christians – Aramaic and Syriac – is pressed to support the old theory that the Prophet borrowed facts and ideas from these two religious systems. Fourth, some of the so-called "foreign" words are used to misinterpret the relevant texts of the Qur'ân.

The first modern orientalist to deal with the subject was Aloys Sprenger who, while engaged to reform the Calcutta Madrasa as its Principal early in the fifties of the nineteenth century, came in contact with a number of classical Arabic works

including Al-Suyûṭî's *Itqân*. As mentioned above, this work contains a chapter on the naturalized Arabic words in the Qur'ân. On the basis of this information Sprenger penned an article captioned "Foreign words occurring in the Qur'ân" which was published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1852.[1] The treatment is sketchy but Sprenger took the opportunity to assail the Prophet by remarking that he made a parade of these foreign terms and a number of other peculiar expressions. Afterwards, in 1880 S. Fraenkel made a more serious study of the "foreign vocabulary" in ancient Arabic poetry and in the Qur'ân.[2]

It is on the basis mainly of Sprenger's article and Fraenkel's work that Theodore Nöldeke made his remarks on the so-called foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ân in his essay on the Qur'ân for the 9th (1891) edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Particularly he mentioned the above noted remark of Sprenger and added: "It is the tendency of the imperfectly educated to delight in out-of-the-way expressions, and on such minds they readily produce a remarkably solemn and mysterious impression. This was exactly the kind of effect that Muhammad desired, and to secure it he seems even to have invented a few vocables as *ghislin* (lxix.36), *sijjin* (lxxxiii.7,80), *tasnim* (lxxxiii. 27) and *salsabil* (lxxvi. 18)."[3] Obviously Nöldeke here abandons even the decorum desirable in dealing with a historical figure and world leader, not to speak of a Prophet or religious personage. He is also absolutely wrong in saying that the Prophet invented the vocables mentioned; for these very words are very clearly mentioned by both classical Muslims scholars as well as the other orientalists as of foreign origin naturalized in Arabic. The innuendo that such invention of odd words was made to impress the imperfectly educated minds is also an unwarranted reflection on the commercially advanced, intelligent and articulate Makkan community and their leaders who were the immediate audience of the Prophet's deliverances and who were not such simpletons and uninformed group of people as Nöldeke naively assumes them to be.

Besides taking Sprenger's line of personal vilification of the Prophet, Nöldeke also initiates the other lines of insinuation. Thus he says that the Prophet, who was "indebted to the instruction of Jews and Christians whose Arabic – as the Koran pretty clearly intimates with regard to one of them – was very defective", "could not fully express his new ideas in the common language of his

[1] *J.A.S.B.*, 1852, pp. 109-114.

[2] S. Fraenkel, *De vocabulis in antiquis Arabum carminibus et in Corano pregrinis*, Leiden, 1880.

[3] Ibn Warraq, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

countrymen" and had to make "free use of such Jewish and Christian words, as was done, though perhaps to a smaller extent by certain thinkers and poets of that age..."[1] It is further said that "his use of these words is sometimes as much at fault as his comprehension of the histories which he learned from the same people – that he applies Aramaic expressions as incorrectly as many uneducated persons employ words derived from the French."[2] As instances Nöldeke mentions *furqân* which, according to him means "redemption", is used by the Prophet, "misled by the Arabic meaning of the root *frq,* 'sever', 'decide'," in the sense of "revelation"; *milla* which means Word is used in the Qur'ân in the sense of religion; and *illiyûn* which "is apparently the Hebrew name of God, *Elyon*," is used to mean "a heavenly book."[3]

These remarks are all untenable and wrong. The assumption that the Prophet borrowed ideas from Judaism and Christianity to make up his religion is, as shown in a previous chapter, totally wrong. It is also wrong, as shown earlier, that the Prophet's knowledge of the Prophetic stories was faulty. Equally wrong is the assumption that the Prophet received instruction from certain Jews and Christians. The Qur'ânic *'âyah* (16:103) which Nöldeke cites as indicating that the Arabic of one of the alleged teachers of the Prophet was very defective does not at all say so. It very strongly rebuts the same allegation of instruction by some person made by the Makkan unbelievers and points out that the language of the individual they hinted at was "foreign" (*'a'jamî*), i. e. not Arabic. But Nöldeke not only misinterprets the *'âyah* as showing that the Prophet had instructors but further distorts its information by saying that the alleged teacher's Arabic was "very defective". Also the assumption that the Prophet was unable to express his ideas "in the common language of his countrymen" is totally unwarranted and untenable. The literary Arabic of the time was very developed and expressive; and a passage of the Qur'ân which does not contain any of the alleged "foreign" words is as much a masterpiece of composition as any other passage. How wrong and unreasonably generalized is Nöldeke's remark is clear from the fact that the *'âyahs* containing the alleged "foreign" words do not constitute even one per cent. of the total volume of the Qur'ânic text. Apart from this, the rest still remains a masterpiece of Arabic literature and gives a loud lie to the absurd statement that the Prophet could not express his ideas in his own language. (This is by way of

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[3] *Ibid.*

rebutting Nöldeke's allegation, not by way of admitting that the Prophet himself composed the Qur'ân). Also there is an element of contradiction in the suggestion that the Prophet had recourse to foreign words and expressions in order to express his ideas and at the same time in saying that he did so without understanding their real meanings or in order to make a parade of his knowledge and to impress his imperfectly educated audience. All this contradiction and absurdity emanate from the basic mistake that the naturalized words used in the Qur'ân are considered "foreign". Nöldeke in fact indirectly admits the fault in his approach when he says, obviously in view of Fraenkel's study, that the Prophet used such words of Jewish and Christian origin "as was done, ... by certain thinkers and poets of that age." This is an admission enough that the words and expressions under reference were naturalized Arabic words that had been in use in the literary works of the time. His qualifying phrase, "though perhaps to a smaller extent", used in respect of "the thinkers and poets of that age" is a poor attempt to obscure this fact of naturalization.

Nöldeke's interpretation of the words *furqân*, *millah* and *illiyûn*, which he thinks to be Aramaic expressions incorrectly used by the Prophet, "as many uneducated persons now employ words derived from the French," betrays his disregard of the fact that when words of foreign origin are naturalized in another language they undergo changes both in forms as well as in meanings. If the three words mentioned are taken from Aramaic, these might equally have assumed modified meanings when they were naturalized in Hebrew. The word *furqân* is very much Arabic and, as Nöldeke himself admits, is derived from the root *frq* (فرق). In fact it is the verbal noun of *faraqa*, to separate, to sever. Its literal meaning is thus separation, distinguishment, extrication or words to the same effect. It has been used in the Qur'ân seven times. At two places, 2:53 and 21:48, it is used to denote the scripture given to Mûsâ (and Hârûn), i. e., the *Tawrâh*. At three places, 2:185, 3:4 and 25:1, it is used as another name for the Qur'ân. Although both the *Tawrâh* and the *Qur'ân* are revealed scriptures, in none of these five places the word *furqân* is used in the sense of "revelation" in the generic sense. Besides, at the two remaining places, 8:29 and 8:41, it is used in quite different meanings. Thus, at 8:29 it is said addressing the believers: "If you fear Allah He will set for you *furqân* (success, victory, deliverance, salvation?)"; and at 8:41, "the day the two hosts met" is called "the day of *furqân* (victory, success, deliverance?)". It is thus clear that the word *furqân* has been used in at least two different senses in the

Qur'ân, and not in the sense of revelation in general, as Nöldeke says, obviously without properly considering the *'âyahs* in which it has been used. He says that the word in Aramaic means "redemption". Others equally competent give it the meaning of "salvation".[1] The two expressions are of course synonymous in the sense of retrieval, reclamation, deliverance, saving of soul from damnation. But the point to note is that in each of these meanings the sense of extrication and distinguishment (*furqân* in Arabic) is clear. The word "salvation" is derived from the Latin *salvâre,* to save; and "salvation" in the theological sense is defined as "the saving of man from the power and penalty of sin, the conferring of eternal happiness."[2] Here also the sense of distinguishment from those who are not thus saved or favoured is clear. The use of *furqân* (separation, distinguishment) in the Qur'ân is thus very appropriate. It is used in respect of both the *Tawrâh* and the Qur'ân because they both distinguish the good from the evil, the right from the wrong. Similarly the sense of distinguishment is implicit in "victory", "success" and "deliverance".

Even if the words *furqân*, *millah* and *illiyûn* are admitted to be derived from Aramaic originals, it is important to note that they would have modified and changed meanings after naturalization in Arabic. A very simple illustrative instance from English is the word "catastrophe", which is composed of the Greek terms *kata*, down, and *strophe*, turning. In strict literal sense "catastrophe" should mean only a down-turning or decline; but in its acquired meaning it is used in a much more serious sense of disaster or calamity. This latter word, calamity, is also a naturalized one in English from the French *calamité,* originally from the Latin *calamitâs, calamitâtis*. More importantly, "catastrophe" is used by Shakespeare in a very strange sense of "rear".[3] Again, the English word "category" (a class or order of things, people, etc. having similar characteristics), is derived from the Greek *kategoria*, meaning assertion, predication, accusation (*kata,* down, and *agorâ*, assembly).[4] It is hard to see the link of sense between the Greek meanings and English meanings. Hundreds of such instances may be cited from the English language alone. It is difficult to assume that Nöldeke and his like are unaware of this very well-known linguistic phenomenon of naturalized words in any language. Their hunt for "foreign" words in the Qur'ân and their persistence in

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[1] See for instance A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 362; also his translation of the word occurring in all the *'âyahs* mentioned.

[2] See for instance *The Chambers Dictionary,* 1998 edition, p. 1458.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

giving these words their supposedly original meanings in total disregard of theme and context are thus indicative only of their prejudice and determination to misinterpret the text of the Qur'ân.

III. ARTHUR JEFFERY'S *FOREIGN VOCABULARY ETC.*

Subsequent writers who have dealt with the subject have generally adopted and reiterated these Sprenger-Nöldeke views. The most elaborate study in this respect is, however, Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ân.*[1] His main purpose is to demonstrate the influence of Judaism and Christianity on the Prophet and the Qur'ân. Thus he starts his introduction with the observation that a distinct impression which is gleaned from a first perusal of what is called "the bewildering confusion of the Qur'ân" is "the amount of material therein which is borrowed from the great religions that were active in Arabia at the time."[2] Proceeding from this standpoint and building upon the facts mentioned by al-Suyûtî Jeffery devotes the greater part of his introduction to an elaboration of the contact made by the Prophet with the Jews, the Christians, the Persians, the Greeks and others. Jeffery then makes three points. First, that "modern scholarship has detected many more words of foreign origin in the vocabulary of the Qur'ân than were ever noted by Muslim investigators."[3] Also that they were not quite correct in their identification of the origin of the words they dealt with.[4] Second, that the Qur'ân "insists over and over again" that the religion which the Prophet introduced was "something new to the Arabs."[5] Therefore it was not likely, argues Jeffery, "that native Arabic vocabulary would be adequate to express all its new ideas, so the obvious policy was to borrow and adopt the necessary technical terms."[6] Third, that many of these terms had "already come into use in Arabia in pre-Islamic times". Jeffery attempts to bring this fact in line with the thesis of Judaeo-Christian influence by adding that such absorption of the "foreign" words had taken place "partly through Arab tribes who had accepted Christianity, partly through commerce with Jews, Christians and Persians, and partly through earlier enquirers interested in these religions." He further stresses that the Prophet had in the beginning only followed in the footsteps of these enquirers. Jeffery then concludes by echoing the Sprenger-Nöldeke views as

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[1] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ân,* Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1938.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[6] *Ibid.*

follows: "It is ... clear that Muhammad set himself definitely to learn about things Jewish and Christian, and thus undoubtedly himself imported new technical terms from these sources. It has been remarked not infrequently that the Prophet had a penchant for strange and mysterious sounding words, and seemed to love to puzzle his audiences with these new terms, though frequently he himself had not grasped correctly their meaning, as one sees in such cases as فرقان and سكينة."[1]

It is unnecessary to dilate here on the fallacy of the theory of Judaeo-Christian influence in general. Also the Sprenger-Nöldeke fallacy of the Prophet's having a liking for strange and mysterious sounding words and the inherent contradiction in the proposition that he was obliged to borrow technical terms from Judaism and Christianity because his native tongue was inadequate to express his new ideas and the allegation that he used these terms without correctly understanding their meanings, have already been pointed out. It remains only to point out the other faults and fallacies in Jeffery's above mentioned statement.

To begin with, he is absolutely wrong in saying that the Qur'ân "insists over and over again" that the religion it presents "is something new to the Arabs." On the contrary, it repeatedly asserts that it merely reiterates and confirms the message delivered by all the previous prophets, particularly that contained in the scriptures of Ibrâhîm and Mûsâ, shorn of the corruption and alteration made in it by human interference. In fact a failure or refusal to recognize this important and repeated declaration of the Qur'ân underlies the orientalists' persistent attempt to prove the indebtedness of the Qur'ân to Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'ân does not hide its link with the previous scriptures, not the least with the teachings of Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ and 'Îsâ (Jesus). It only claims to rectify the faults and fallacies of the prevailing Judaism and Christianity and to confirm and complete the message delivered by all the previous Prophets.

Second, it is not at all true that the Arabic language of the time was inadequate to express the ideas of the Qur'ân. The so-called technical terms of Judaism and Christianity will be found on analysis to relate only to peripheral matters. So far as the basic ideas of monotheism, the Absolute Oneness of God, His Absolute dominion over all the creation, His having no partners in any shade or form, His having no son or incarnation, the resurrection of the dead, the principle of individual accountability on the Day of Judgement, reward and punishment, life in the hereafter, the fact of the Jews' and Christians' having deviated from the

[1] *Ibid.* pp. 38-39.

original and true message and their having tampered with the scriptures are all related in simple Arabic, without the help of the so-called technical terms from Judaism and Christianity, but in unmistakable and unambiguous terms. And, as already mentioned, shorn of the *'âyahs* containing the so-called foreign words, the remainder of the Qur'ân is still a masterpiece of Arabic containing all its main teachings.

Third, Jeffery's attempt to twist the fact of naturalization and bring this in line with the theme of borrowing from Judaism and Christianity is fraught with a number of fallacies. (a) The so-called foreign words and expressions that had already been in use are gleaned not from the writings of the "Arab tribes who had accepted Christianity". Even the one or two poets who belonged to the Christian Arab tribes did not write on any theological subject. (b) Nor could the words that passed into Arabic "through commerce with Jews, Christians and Persians" have any conceivable relevance to theological ideas. (c) Nor were the "inquirers" mentioned interested "in these religions", i. e., Judaism and Christianity. On the contrary these inquirers, the *ḥanîfs*, were seeking true monotheism away from and being disgusted with the corrupt Judaism and Christianity they were aware of.

In fact Jeffery's researches go to show that the words he identifies as of foreign origin had actually been naturalized and become regular Arabic words before they came to be used in the Qur'ân. He lists some 275 such words other than proper names. "About three-quarters of the words in this list", as Watt points out, "can be shown to have been in use in Arabic before the time of Muhammad, ... Of the remaining 70 or so, though there is no written evidence of their earlier use, it may well be true that they were already employed in speech..."[1] And, in view of the fact that Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic are cognate Semitic languages having common origin in the original Arabic-Aramaic mentioned above, they have many words in common and also similar forms. It is thus difficult in many cases to say which of such common words is derived from which of these languages.

IV. LUXENBERG'S SYRO-ARAMAIC READING AND TORREY'S *COMMERCIAL-THEOLOGICAL TERMS*

The latest work on the subject is *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* by one Christoph Luxenberg, a pseudonym, who is said to be "a scholar of ancient Semitic languages in Germany.[2] Adopting the line of Wansborough and the

[1] Watt, *Bell's Introduction etc., op. cit.*, p. 85.
[2] Published by Verlag Das Arabische Buch, Berlin, 2001.

"revisionists" in general who advance the absurd theory of gradual and later evolution of the Qur'ân out of a multiplicity of sources Luxenberg attempts to show that parts of the Qur'ân are derived from pre-existing Christian Aramaic texts that were misinterpreted by later Islamic scholars who prepared the editions of the Qur'ân now in use. Each of the assumptions contained in this premise is wrong and unsubstantiated. It is nowhere clearly stated or established who prepared the "parts" of the Qur'ân on the basis of pre-Islamic Christian Aramaic texts, and when and where. If later Islamic scholars misinterpreted the parts of the text, why did the Muslims who had hitherto been reading and using the Qur'ân not raise any objections to the alleged misinterpretations? How could later Islamic scholars of a certain period all agree on such alleged misinterpretations? How, again, could any alleged misinterpretation of the text constitute any alteration and edition of it? Luxenberg and his supporters do not ask themselves these questions, let alone advancing any specific evidence on any of these points.

The theory that the Qur'ân is based on pre-existing Christian and Jewish texts is old and untenable. Also, the attempt to ascribe Hebrew, Syriac or Aramaic origins to some words or expressions in the Qur'ân is nothing new. In fact Luxenberg's main drive is towards this topic of the so-called foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ân, together with the supposedly original meanings of such words, with no new fact or argument but only a repetition in effect and different forms of the old and stale Sprenger-Nöldeke assumptions and surmises. But just how grossly mistaken Luxenberg is will be clear from one of his main arguments, namely, that the word *ḥûr* means in Aramaic "white" or "white raisins", and not chaste and extremely beautiful damsels, as the Qur'ânic commentators say, taking *ḥûr* to be the plural of the Arabic word *hourî* meaning chaste and beautiful girl.

Now, the word *hûr* occurs four times in the Qur'ân, at 44:54, 52:20, 55:72 and 56:22. At each of these places it is of course mentioned in connection with a description of paradise in which the righteous will be admitted. Thus *'âyah* 44:54 states: ... و زوجناهم بحور عين " ... and We shall marry them with *hûr*, having attractively wide eyes." The same statement occurs at 52:20. *'Âyah* 55:72, describing the fair wives (*khayrât*) of the inmates of paradise, states: حور مقصورات فى الخيام "They are *ḥûr*, guarded in pavilions." And *'âyah* 56:22 similarly states that the inmates of paradise will have "*ḥûr* having attractively wide eyes." Thus in all the four places *ḥûr* are meant to be beings suitable to be companions and given in marriage; and they are invariably described as having attractively beautiful eyes. Whatever one conceives

to be the origin of the word *ḥûr*, no sensible person having any regard to the contexts and themes of the passages can suggest that *ḥûr* in these passages means "white raisins."

Another of Luxenberg's arguments is that the description of paradise in the Qur'ân is similar to a fourth century Christian text called Hymns of Paradise and that the Qur'ânic word for paradise is derived from the Aramaic word for garden. Yes, the word for paradise in the Qur'ân is *jannah* or *jannât*, which in Arabic mean garden or gardens. So even if the word is admitted to be of Aramaic origin, neither the Qur'ân nor its commentators have given it any different meaning. Moreover, the similarity of the Qur'ânic description of paradise with the Christian Hymns of Paradise which might in its turn have been based on an even earlier Christian text goes only to substantiate the Qur'ânic claim that it corroborates and completes the message of the earlier scriptures. Luxenberg and his advocates should remember that mere similarity between an earlier and later description does not automatically prove that the latter is copied from the former. His attempt to ascribe to the Qur'ânic words of Syriac or Aramaic origin their supposedly original meanings is simply a manoeuvre to misinterpret the Qur'ân disregarding the important fact that words adopted and naturalized in another language undergo changes both in forms and meanings.

Before concluding this section relating to the vocabulary of the Qur'ân mention should be made of C. C. Torrey's *The Commercial Theological Terms of the Koran.*[1] Torrey is known as an advocate of what is called the Jewish foundation of Islam.[2] In the present work, however, he concentrates on the commercial terms and figures of speech in the Qur'ân and suggests that it appeared .in an atmosphere of commerce and high finance. Ever since its publication the work has been made use of by many an orientalist to advance a socio-economic interpretation of the rise of Islam. The trend has been carried to an extreme by W. M. Watt. The fallacies and contradictions of his socio-economic interpretation has been demonstrated at another place.[3] Here it may be pointed out that in so far as the Qur'ân is concerned, agricultural terms and imageries are no less numerous and vivid in it than what is called the commercial-theological terms.[4] The whole worldly life is likened in the Qur'ân to a cultivating field for securing

[1] Published in Leiden, 1892.

[2] See his *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York, 1933.

[3] See M. M. Ali, *Sîrat al-Nabî and the Orientalists,* 2 vols., Madina, 1997, chaps. IV and XXIV.

[4] See for instance Q. 2:71; 2:223; 2:264-266; 6:136-138; 6:141; 13:3-4; 16:11; 18:32-42; 26:146-148; 34:15-16; 36:33-36; 44:25-27; 48:29; 50:7-11; 56:63-64; 68:22; 71:11-12; 78:16; etc.

provision for the life in the hereafter.[1] The doctrine of monotheism, the central theme of the Qur'ân, is brought home by repeated references to Allah's grace and bounty in sending down rains from the sky and thereby enlivening the barren earth and causing plants, fruits and corns to grow out of it. Even paradise is generally depicted as a well-laid garden with all kinds of delicious fruit-trees and streams running through them. As Allah brings forth plants out of the earth, so will He raise the dead from it on the resurrection day.[2] Even the act of procreation and therefore the process of continuing human race is likened to cultivating one's own field.[3] On the basis of such expressions and statements one could state equally confidently that the Qur'ân appeared against an essentially and predominantly agricultural background. That would, however, be another misleading conclusion; just as the attempt to identify words of foreign origin and give them their supposedly original meanings is misleading and misconceived.

V. The Theory of Copyist's Errors and the Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Qur'ân

Another line of the orientalists' attempt to assail the Qur'ân is to find faults with certain words and to assume that they are copyists' errors, with the implication that these should be rectified and emended. The foremost among the protagonists of this plea for revision is J. A. Bellamy who wrote a series of articles[4] on the subject in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. In these articles he examines some twenty-two difficult words and expressions in the Qur'ân which he thinks are mistakes due to errors committed by copyists or mistakes in the originals from which parts of the Qur'ân were drawn. Therefore he suggests emendations of these words or expressions, understandably by the orientalists themselves. He concludes his last essay in the series as follows: "Non-Muslim Koranic scholars agree that Muhammad, in one way or another, composed the Koran, so they tend to lay all the problems of the text at his doorstep, usually without considering that mistakes in the tradition of the text as well as in the sources from which parts of the Koran were drawn might be at fault."[5]

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[1] Q. 42:20.
[2] Q. 35:9; 50:11.
[3] Q. 2:223.
[4] J. A. Bellamy, "Al-Raqîm or al-Ruqûd'? A note on *sûrah* 18:9", *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 1991, pp. 115-117; "Fa-Ummuhu Hâwiyah: A note on *sûrah* 101:9", *ibid.*, 1992, pp. 485-487; "Some proposed emendations to the text of the Koran", *ibid.*, 1993, pp. 562-573; and "More proposed emendations to the text of the Koran", *ibid.*, 1996, pp. 196-204.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

It must at once be pointed out that Muslims do not at all accept the view that the Qur'ân is, "in one way or another", composed by Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him. That view of the orientalists is in fact the point at issue. Also, the statement that there might be fault "in the tradition of the text as well as in the sources from which parts of the Koran were drawn" is a mere conjecture which has no valid basis at all. Both these premises of Bellamy's are merely an echo of his predecessor orientalists' views and assumptions that are totally groundless. As regards the words and phrases, these have been explained and interpreted by both classical commentators and modern lexicographers. Bellamy has disregarded these explanations and interpretations and has drawn his conclusions on faulty understanding or misinterpretation of them. In fact in his last article on the subject published in 1996 he has himself modified his earlier hypothesis that the mysterious letters at the beginning of some *sûrahs* are old abbreviations of the *basmalah*. Incidentally, the doyen of the nineteenth century orientalists, Theodor Nöldeke, had come up with an equally absurd theory that the mysterious letters are abbreviations of the names of persons who wrote the *sûrahs*!

Just how far-fetched and untenable are Bellamy's assumptions will be obvious if we look at a couple of samples of his reasoning. Thus, the first word he deals with in his article in the *JAOS* for 1993 is *ḥaṣab* (حصب) occurring at Q. 21:98 (انكم و ما تعبدون من دون الله حصب جهنم). He says that the ordinary meaning of the word is "pebble" and that the meaning of "fuel" given to it by commentators and by lexicographers like Al-Zabîdî (*Tâj al-'arûs*) and Lane is wrong. He also arbitrarily rejects their view that the word is Ethiopic or Najdî or Yamanî in origin. He even rejects the suggestion of Ch. Rabin that the word might have been derived from the Hebrew *ḥaṣbah* meaning wood or wood-cutting. Then he says that the correct word here should be *ḥaṭab* (حطب) which "is the regular word in Arabic for firewood and occurs elsewhere in the Qur'ân ... It is easy to see how the mistake occurred; in copying *ḥaṭab,* the scribe forgot to write the vertical stroke of the *ṭ*, turning it into a *ṣ*."[1]

Now, the statement: "in copying *ḥaṭab*, the scribe forgot to write the vertical stroke of *ṭ*", is a pure surmise. It presupposes that there was the word *ḥaṭab* in the original from which the scribe is supposed to have copied; but no such original containing the word *ḥaṭab* in this place is in existence or referred to by the writer.

[1] *JOAS*, 1993, p. 564.

If it is argued that there was only one rare original from which the supposed scribe allegedly copied it and which has been lost, then it is only reasonable to assume that the scribe in question would have been especially careful to compare his copy with the original each time he finished copying a page or a *sûrah*. Even a single reading of what he wrote, without comparing it with the original, would have made him aware of the oddity of the meaning of what he had written. Moreover, since the Qur'ân is not just an ordinary work concerning the author and his prospective readers but a religious scripture meant to regulate the life and conduct of a large community of believers, the alleged copying could only have been accomplished under the auspices and supervision of a central religious authority and the copy would have been thoroughly checked and re-checked and meticulously compared with the original before its publication. Thus the surmise of a copyist's error here is totally unreasonable and untenable, being based on an arbitrary and unproved assumption that there was another word here in the original, a further arbitrary assumption of carelessness on the part of the supposed copyist and a total ignoring of how a religious scripture is usually issued and circulated in any community.

As regards the alleged inappropriateness of the word *ḥaṣab* here in respect of meaning, Bellamy is wrong in a number of ways. He seems to ignore the fact that a word may have more than one primary meaning as well as secondary or derived meanings. He rejects the meaning of "fuel" given to it by both classical and modern commentators and lexicographers merely on the supposition that *ḥaṣab* cannot have any derivative meaning and should always bear the meaning of "pebble". He seems to overlook that words or expressions otherwise odd but used in authoritative works in particular senses to be understood from the context only are accepted by the speakers of the language in question as bearing those senses. The so many odd and apparently grammatically strange words and expressions in the works of Shakespeare have thus found their places and been given the particular meanings in the English dictionaries prepared after his time. It is thus not out of lack of knowledge and understanding that the classical and modern commentators and lexicographers have given the meaning of "fuel" to *ḥaṣab* here. In fact the word *ḥaṣab* is just to the point here in respect of context as well as meaning; and it would be equally sensible even if it is given its primary meaning of pebble or crushed rock. The *'âyah* 21:98 speaks of the unbelievers/idolaters and tells them that they and what they worship (of idols and

images made of stone) will be *ḥaṣab* of hell-fire (*jahannam*). At two other places (2:24 & 6:66) the Qur'ân asks the unbelievers to be aware of the hell-fire of which the fuel (*waqûd*) will be men and stones (*ḥijârah*). Some commentators explain the stones to be the stone idols and images worshipped by the idolaters. It is noteworthy that the subject-matter of the *'âyah* under discussion, 21:98, is the same and it reminds the unbelievers that they and what they worship of idols and images will be *ḥaṣab* of the hell-fire. The sense will be quite clear whether one gives *ḥaṣab* its derivative sense of fuel or its primary meaning of pebble/crushed stone/rock, knowing that in the two above mentioned places the Qur'ân mentions stones as fuel of the hell-fire. It may be mentioned that some people put pebbles in fire places to increase the heat of fire and to retain the heat for a considerably long time even after the fire itself is extinguished. In China, extremely heated pebbles or pieces of stone are used, instead of direct fire, in cooking a delicate dish of fish. Fillets of fresh fish are placed in a cooking ware with a measure of cold water and are brought on the dining table where clean and extremely heated stone pieces are dropped into the cooking ware. The high heat of the stones instantly makes the water boil and the boiling continues for several minutes in which time the fish is perfectly done. It is then immediately served to the guests along with the hot water which makes a delicious soup. The present writer himself recently saw the preparation of this dish which was served to him in a well-known hotel in Beijing. In view of this fact and the context of the *'âyah* in question, and also in view of our experience of lava turning into hard rocks, the Qur'ânic mention of stones and pebbles as fuel of the hell-fire is very appropriate and significant..

The second word Bellamy deals with in this article of his (*JAOS* 1993) is *ummah* occurring in 11:8 and 12:45. He thinks that the meaning of "while, time" given by commentators and translators to the word in both the places, particularly the first, is dictated by the context only but this cannot be its proper meaning. He even disagrees with such European translators as Paret and Blachère who give the same meaning of "time" or "while" to the word. Then he says that the meaning here plainly must be "time, while", but this can be done only "by emending *h* to *d,* and reading *amad*, which means 'time, term, period of time" and which occurs four times elsewhere in the Qur'ân. He further says that the feminine ending to the adjective *ma'dûdah* "would occur naturally to anyone reading *ummah* for *amad*;

the copyist may even have thought he was correcting the text, but he may have done it instinctively without being aware of it."[1]

This argument of Bellamy is similarly beset with the same fallacy and unreasonableness as is his assumption of a copyist's error in connection with the word *ḥaṣab* mentioned above. But here Bellamy assumes a double fault on the part of the supposed copyist. He is supposed to have misread the word *amad* as *ummah,* and as he supposedly did so he even either corrected the adjective *ma'dûd* by rendering it as *ma'dûdah* or he might "have done it instinctively without being aware of it." Thus does Bellamy piles one unwarranted assumption upon another on the basically wrong surmise of a copyist's error. He fails to see the fault in his own reasoning that if his supposed copyist was capable of correcting the adjective by rendering it in the feminine form or if he instinctively made the correction he would have paused to think if he was correctly copying the text from the original, for he would have understood the meaning of what he was writing and would have detected his error in writing *ummah* for *amad.* It cannot be assumed that he simply knew how to copy from an Arabic manuscript and even to correct a supposed error but did not understand the language! Rather, it is indispensable on any copyist's or editor's part to be able to understand the text in a manuscript before he can afford to copy or edit it.

The fact is that neither did the supposed copyist commit an error in writing *ummah* for *amad*, nor did he arrogate to himself the right and duty to rectify a grammatical error arising out of his erroneous copying, nor did he fail to understand the meaning of the expression he was copying. Also, he did not find any difficulty with the meaning of the word *ummah* here. The difficulty which Bellamy finds arises, first, out of his failure to see that like many other words *ummah* is used in the Qur'ân in a variety of meanings and, second, his not having considered even all the usual English meanings for it. Besides the usual meaning of a nation, community, or a group of people, *ummah* is used in the Qur'ân in at least half a dozen other shades of meanings like species,[2] a person in whom all the good qualities are combined (an ideal leader to be followed)[3] and a period of time.[4] More important than this, in almost all standard Arabic-English dictionaries

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[1] *JAOS*, 1993, p. 564.

[2] Q. 6:38.

[3] Q. 16:120.

[4] See for these shades of meanings for the word , Majd al-Dîn Muḥammad Ya'qûb al-Fîrûzâbâdî, *Baṣâ'ir dhawî al-tamyîz fî laṭâ'if al-Kitâb al-'Azîz* (ed. Muḥammad 'Alî al-Najjâr), Beirut, n. d., vol. II, 79-80; and Al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dâmaghânî, *Qâmûs al-Qur'ân* (ed. 'Abd al-'Azîz Sayyid al-'Ahl), Beirut, 1985, pp. 42-44.

the meaning of *ummah* is given as "nation, people, generation".[1] The last word in this series, generation, means, *inter alia*, "average period in which (regarded as 30 years) children grow up, marry, and have children".[2] *Ummah* in 11:8 has this sense of generation, i. e., a period of time; and the relevant part of the *'âyah* may be translated as: "And if We put off from them the punishment till a reckoned generation, they will surely say: "What has held it back?" And since the *'âyah* speaks of punishment for unbelieving and sinful people, the word *ummah* or 'generation' is very apposite here. In a sense, Bellamy's problem relates to the problem of accurately rendering the meaning of the Qur'ânic text into English.

Let us now look at another expression Bellamy deals with in his latest article.[3] He finds difficulty with *lammâ* (لما) occurring in 11:111 (*wa inna kullan lammâ la-yuwaffiynnahum rabbuka a'mâlahum* و ان كلا لما ليوفينهم ربك أعمالهم – "And surely each one of them – thy Lord will pay them in full for their deeds"[4]. He rejects the grammatical explanation given for *lammâ* here by the commentators and also by some of the orientalists like R. Bell and G. Bargsträsser and then, building upon the hint given by J. Barth that it would be better to delete the word altogether, jumps to the conclusion that *lammâ* got into the text here because of the copyist's error. "The copyist's eye", writes Bellamy, "after he had written *inna kullan* strayed back to v. 109, where we find *wa-innâ la-muwaffûhum naṣîbahum* وانا لموفوهم نصيبهم (And indeed we shall give them their full portion). He proceeded to write *la-muwaffûhum*, but caught his mistake after writing only *lâm* and *mîm*, which he then cancelled with a vertical stroke. This stroke was read by a later copyist as *alîf* after the *mîm*, thus producing the meaningless *lammâ*."

It is not necessary to discuss here the grammatical explanations given by the commentators regarding *lammâ*. It would suffice to point out only the faults in Bellamy's assumption. First, his surmise that his supposed copyist's eye strayed back to v. 109 is totally unreasonable; for there the clause in question starts with *innâ*, not *inna;* and it is not followed by *kullan* (و انا لموفوهم and و ان كلا) so that there is no apparent similarity of letters or words to confuse the eye and make the copyist proceed with the writing of the succeeding word *la-muwaffûhum*. Second, if the copyist caught his mistake after writing only *lâm* and *mîm*, he would not have simply put a vertical stroke over *mîm* to cancel his mistake; he would either have

[1] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (ed. J. Milton Cowan), Beirut, 1974, p.25.

[2] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, ed. A. S. Hornby and others, third edition, 1974, eighteenth impression, 1983, p. 357.

[3] *JAOS*, 1996, 00. 196-204.

[4] A. J Arberry's translation, *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 224.

put vertical strokes over both the letters or would have penned through both of them or, likelier still, he would have modified *mîm* into *yâ'* by a little broadening of the line and putting two dots underneath the curve (لير/لمر). Third, the assumption that a subsequent copyist committed a further error in misreading the vertical stroke over *mîm* as *alif* and thus writing *lmmâ* is all the more unreasonable because, if he was a contemporary copyist, he would have used the original copy to make his copy from or, if he was a later copyist, there would have been other copies in circulation; for it cannot be presumed that only one copy of the Qur'ân made from an original copy continued to be used for a generation or so when another copy was made from it! The assumption also presupposes that the supposedly subsequent copyist was not only careless in writing but also incapable of understanding the text he was copying.

Another expression which Bellamy finds fault with is *wa qîlihi* at 43:88 (*wa qîlihi yâ rabbi inna hâ'ulâ'i qaumun lâ yu'minûn* – "And his saying: O my Lord, verily these are a people that do not believe". He rejects the explanation of the case of *qîlihi* here given by the commentators and assumes that this is also a case of the copyist's error. He says that this word should be read *wa qablahu* which the copyist inserted as a note "to indicate that v. 87 was displaced and that v. 88 should be put before it." He seeks support for this assumption in what he says that orientalists "have always been willing to find displaced verses in the Koran" and argues that a copyist, if he found he had made such a mistake, "could tear up the whole sheet and start again from scratch, or he could cross out the displaced passage and copy it again in its correct position, but both these procedures would result in the loss of valuable papyrus or vellum. The sensible thing to do would be to add a note at the head of the verse to indicate its displacement... In this case the notation crept into the text and its real purpose was forgotten."[1]

In this instance also Bellamy piles one untenable assumption upon another. In the first place, the assumption that there was a displacement of the *'âyah* in question is wrong. The previous two *'âyahs* speak about the attitude of the unbelievers and the insertion of the *'âyah* 88 in between the two, bringing *'âyah* 77 after the present *âyah* 88, would disrupt the description and would be incongruous. The *'âyah* 88 refers to the complaint of the Prophet in view of the attitude of the unbelievers and is thus just in its proper place. The expression *yâ rabbi* (O my Lord) or *rabbi* (My Lord) is a form of address which occurs many

[1] *Ibid.*

times in the Qur'ân and it is almost invariably preceded by "he said" (*qâla*) or words to the same effect.[1] The expression *wa qîlihi* (and his saying) is thus very much appropriate here and in tune with the form of address "O My Lord" which follows it.

Bellamy says with regard to the word discussed just before the present one that the supposed copyist cancelled his mistake by putting a vertical stroke over the mistaken word. It is thus not understandable why the supposed copyist in the present instance could not have cancelled his supposed mistake by penning through the supposedly displaced *'âyah*. It is a poor plea to say, as Bellamy does, that the copyist did not do so because that would result in the loss of valuable papyrus or vellum; for penning through a line or so would not have resulted in the loss of the entire sheet of vellum or papyrus. It is also reasonable to assume that a copyist, when he set to copy such a voluminous work, would be careful to provide against such errors by having ready at hand materials for erasing or wiping off words written mistakenly or for rectifying the error by pasting over it a chit of vellum or papyrus with the expressions written correctly on it. It is also not sensible to assume that the supposed copyist would have added "*qablahu*" at the head of an *'âyah* to indicate its displacement. Such a notation, if at all made, would have been placed within brackets or such distinguishing marks as would militate against its being mistaken as part of the *'âyah*. Also, as in the case of the word discussed before, in this case also the assumption presupposes the existence of only one copy of the Qur'ân when the supposedly subsequent copyist made his copy, and further that the latter was careless enough to mistake the notation as part of the *'âyah* and ignorant enough not to understand the strangeness of the expression he was copying – all of which presuppositions are totally unreasonable and untenable. Most important of all, if the supposed copyist did at all insert a notation to indicate the displacement of the *'âyah* in question, he would have used the expression *qablahâ*, not *qablahu*; for *'âyah* is feminine in gender and would never have been referred to as *hu*.

It is not necessary to examine here the other words or expressions that Bellamy cites to prove his theory. Suffice to say that his theory of copyists' or other errors in the Qur'ân needing emendation of them is totally absurd being contrary to reason and the rules of grammar, context and meanings. The twenty or so words and expressions he deals with are simply so many mistakes on his part.

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[1] See Q. 2:126, 260; 3:36; 3:40,41,47; 5:25; 7:151,155; 11:45,47; 12:33,101; 14:35,36,40; 25:30; etc. See also Muḥammad Fuwâd 'Abd al-Bâqî, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li 'Alfâẓ al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*, under the word *rabbi*.

CHAPTER XIII
THE ORIENTALISTS' TRANSLATIONS OF THE QUR'ÂN

I. THE EARLIEST ORIENTALIST TRANSLATIONS

The story of the translation of the Qur'ân by the orientalists goes back to the beginning of orientalism itself. Rather, orientalism in its modern sense may be said to have started with the translation of the Qur'ân. For, even before the launching of the Second Crusade, Christian thinkers realized the need for combating Islam on the intellectual level and forging what P. K. Hitti calls "an instrument of a pacific crusade".[1] Foremost among such thinkers were the Archbishop Raymond of Toledo (1126-51) and Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (d. 1157). The former was instrumental in establishing a school of translation at Toledo where important Arabic works on theology and science were translated; while the latter, Peter the Venerable, commissioned the first translation of the Qur'ân in an attempt to refute Islam. This translation was made in Latin and completed in 1143 by Robert Ketenensis of Chester, Hermann of Dalmatia and two other associates. The initiatives taken by Archbishop Raymond and Peter the Venerable resulted in the establishment of the first School of Oriental Studies in Europe at Toledo in 1250, the College of Friars at Miramar in 1276 for the study of Arabic in which Raymond Lull of Catalania played an important part, and the resolution of the Council of Vienna in 1311 creating chairs of Arabic at the universities of Paris, Louvain and Salamanca.

A manuscript of this first Latin translation of the Qur'ân containing the autograph of the translator exists in the Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal in Paris. This translation, as already mentioned, was made professedly for *refuting* Islam and was as such not only highly prejudiced but distorted at many places. Its chief defect was that it was not quite a translation but mainly a paraphrasing of the passages of the Qur'ân. According to Sale, "it deserves not the name of a translation; the unaccountable liberties therein taken, and the numberless faults, both of omission and commission, leaving scarce any resemblance of the original." [2] Nevertheless, this work remained the sole or main translation of the Qur'ân available to the Europeans for about five centuries. It was given wide publicity during the European Reformation Movement of the 16th century. Martin Luther, who himself translated the Bible into German, wrote a preface to this Latin translation

[1] P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 6th edition, reprinted London, 1958, p. 663.

[2] George Sale, *The Koran etc.*, London, 1734, preface (To the Reader), p. V.

of the Qur'ân; and four editions of it together with Luther's preface and some other works of Christian propaganda were published by Thomas Bibliander from Basel and Zurich between 1543 and 1550.

More important than this, it became the basis for translation of the Qur'ân into modern European languages. Thus Andrea Arrivabene made from this Latin translation an Italian version, *L' Alcorano di Macometto*, which was published in 1547. This was the first translation of the Qur'ân in a modern European language. Though Arrivabene claims to have made his translation directly from the Arabic, "it is", as J. D. Pearson rightly points out, "clearly a translation or paraphrase of the work of Robertus Ketenensis published by Bibliander."[1] "It is very incorrect", writes a famous orientalist himself, "as it is from the Latin version of Robert Retenensis (Bibliander)."[2] This "very incorrect" Italian translation of the Latin paraphrasing was used in turn for making the first German translation, *Alcoranus Mahometicus*, by Solomon Schweigger which was published from Nuremberg in 1616. And from this translation of the translation of the translation was made the first Dutch translation, *De Arabische Alkoran*, issued anonymously in 1641.

Shortly following this Dutch translation came the first French translation (*L' Alcoran de Mahomet*) by André du Ryer, who had been French Consul in Egypt, which was published from Paris in 1647. Although he is said to have had a considerable knowledge of both the Turkish and Arabic languages and although it is said to have been made from Arabic, it is, as Sale puts it, "far from being a just translation; there being mistakes in every page, besides frequent transpositions, omissions and additions, faults unpardonable in a work of this nature."[3] André du Ryer, though he lived in Alexandria for a considerable time, had a very jaundiced notion of the Qur'ân, as most of his sort had. In his French epistle to the reader he thus says about the Qur'ân: "The book is a long conference of God, the Angels, and Mahomet, which that false Prophet very grossly invented; sometimes he introduceth God who speaketh to him, and teacheth him his Law, then an angel, anon the Prophets, and frequently maketh God to speak in the plurall, in a stile [style] that is not ordinary... He intituled this book the *alcoran*, as one would say, the Collection of Precepts...Thou will wonder that such absurdities have infected the best part of the world and wilt avouch, that the knowledge of what is contained in this Book, will render that Law contemptible."[4] Thus the motive of

[1] *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, Vol. I, Cambridge, p. 504.
[2] S. M. Zwemer, "Translations of the Koran", *The Moslem World*, Vol. V, 1911 (pp. 244-261), p. 249.
[3] Sale, *op. cit.*, p. VI.
[4] Translated by A Ross, *The Alcoran of Mahomet etc.*, London, 1649, p. A4.

du Ryer, like all his predecessors, was to discredit and refute Islam by making his readers aware of what he called the "absurdities" in the Qur'ân.

And it is from this grossly faulty French translation that the first English translation was made by Alexander Ross and published from London in 1649, just two years after the publication of the French translation. Ross very clearly admits that his translation was an English rendering of du Ryer's French translation, as the title of his work runs: *The Alcoran of Mahomet, Translated out of the Arabique into French, by the Sieur du Ryer, Lord of Malezair, and Resident for the King of France, at Alexandria. And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities.* Like du Ryer Ross also aimed at exposing what he called the "Turkish vanities." This phrase betrays, on the one hand, his and his contemporary Europeans' dislike of the Turks because of their political influence in Europe and, on the other, the common European misconception about Islam. Ross's translation was, however, still worse than the French original which he translated; for Ross, "being utterly unacquainted with the Arabic, and no great master of the French, has added a number of fresh mistakes of his own to those of Du Ryer; not to mention the meanness of his language..."[1] The French translation of du Ryer also fathered a version in Dutch by Glazemaker, published in 1658[2], another in German by Lange, published in 1688 and another in Russian by Postnikov and Veryovkin. All these translations and versions were printed a number of times throughout the seventeenth century and after.

Thus for more than five hundred years, from the middle of the 12th to the end of the 17th century there were two basic translations of the Qur'ân, the one in Latin by Robert Retenensis (1143) and the other in French by du Ryer (1647) from which other translations were made into Italian, German, Dutch, English and Russian. Both these two basic translations and those that emanated from them are, by the admission of subsequent orientalists themselves, not worth the name of translations and are grossly incorrect and faulty, being vitiated by omissions, commissions and transpositions. All these translations were also professedly aimed at refuting Islam and the Qur'ân. This declared purpose could not be achieved if only because of the very faulty nature of these works; but it served to give a distorted picture of the Qur'ân and of Islam to the Europeans and in that sense it served its purpose. After all, these translations were primarily

[1] Sale, *op. cit.*, p. VI. See also similar remarks by Zwemer who calls Ross's translation "faulty in the extreme." See *The Moslem World*, 1927, p. 250.

[2] Glazemaker, *Mahomets Alkoran, Door de Heer du Ryer uit d'Arabische in de Franche taal gestelt, etc.*, Amsterdam, 1658.

aimed at the European readership, for the European imperial expansion was yet to take place and none of the European languages had hitherto gained currency among any non-European people to any noticeable extent.

II. THE TRANSLATION OF LUDOVICCO MARRACCI AND ITS OFF-SHOOTS

Towards the end of the 17th century a new Latin translation was made by Ludovico Marracci which was published at Padua in 1698.[1] Marracci was a "Confessor" to Pope Innocent XI and the work was dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I. The professed aim of the work was the same as that of its predecessors, to refute and discredit Islam and the Qur'ân; but it differed from its predecessors in scope. It not only gave a translation together with the Arabic text, but added explanatory notes and comments and introduced the whole work by a companion volume entitled a "Refutation of the Qur'ân", which was a summing up of all the prejudicial views and distortions about the Prophet of Islam and the Qur'ân propagated by his predecessor orientalists. Even the comments and explanatory notes were carefully selected from the unorthodox and faulty Arabic commentaries so as to give the worst possible impression of Islam. These were given in two forms: in the translation of almost every *'âyah* explanatory notes were inserted in the body of the translation which more often than not distorted its meaning; and further comments for the same purpose were added as footnotes. A second edition of this work, with additions and annotations, was published in 1721.

Naturally this work was eagerly welcomed by the Christian enthusiasts and evangelists and it was translated as well as made the basis for further translations in a number of modern European languages. Thus, just five years after its publication David Nerreter translated Marracci's translation into German which was published at Nurenberg in 1703. And in 1734 was published the famous English translation of George Sale which was based on Marracci's work.[2] Like Marracci Sale introduced his translation by *A Preliminary Discourse* on Islam and the Qur'ân. This preliminary Discourse as well as the notes and comments were based on Marracci's work. Although Sale states that he made his translation directly from the original Arabic, there is no doubt, as Rodwell, a subsequent

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[1] Marracci, *Alcorani textus universus Ex correctoribus Arabum exemplaribus summa fide, etc.*, Padua, 1698.

[2] George Sale, *The Koran, commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammad, Translated into English immediately from the original Arabic; with Explanatory Notes, taken from the most approved Commentators. To which is prefixed A Preliminary Discourse*, London, 1734.

English translator of the Qur'ân, observes that "Sale's work mainly owes its merits" to the research of Marracci. "Sale has ... followed Marracci too closely, especially by introducing his periphrastic comments into the body of the text, as well as by his constant use of Latinized instead of Saxon words."[1] Sale himself guardedly alludes to his indebtedness to Marracci thus: "In 1698, a Latin *translation of the* Koran, *made by father* Lewis Marracci, ... *was published at Padua, together with the original text, accompanied by explanatory notes and a refutation. This translation of* Marracci's, *generally speaking, is very exact; but he adheres to the* Arabic *idiom too literally to be easily understood, ... The notes he has added are indeed of great use; but his refutations, which swell the work to a large volume, are of little or none at all, being often unsatisfactory, and sometimes impertinent. The work, however, with all its faults, is very valuable, and I should be guilty of ingratitude, did I not acknowledge myself much obliged thereto; but still, being in* Latin, *it can be of no use to those who understand not that tongue.*"[2]

Thus Sale's work was essentially an English rendering of Marracci's with the modification of what was considered to be his too literal adherence to the Arabic idiom and the "unsatisfactory" and "impertinent" aspects of his "Refutation of the Qur'ân." Sale's work proved very popular in Europe and the English-speaking countries and it went through a number of reprints and editions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, principally in 1764, 1774, 1795, 1801, 1812, 1821, 1824, 1825, 1826, 1836, 1838 and 1844.[3] The edition of 1844 contained a memoir of the translator, Sale, written by R. A. Davenport and various notes and comments from Savary's French translation.[4] In the late nineteenth century the Rev. E. M. Wherry used Sale's work to issue his *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Qur'ân: comprising Sale's translation and preliminary discourse.*[5] And in this new and enlarged form Sale's work was reprinted in 1896, 1900, and 1917. In 1921 it was republished with an introduction by Sir Denison Ross and it remained in reprint till at least 1973. Sale's "A Preliminary Discourse" was also translated and published separately in several European languages. It was also translated into

[1] J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran: translated from the Arabic, the surahs arranged in chronological order, with notes and index*, London, 1861, preface, p. xxv.
[2] Sale, *op.cit.* pp. vi-vii.
[3] See for details of publishers and places of publication J. D. Pearson's "Bibliography of Translations of the Qur'ân into European languages", *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, Vol. I., Cambridge, 1975, Appendix, p. 508.
[4] See below for Savary.
[5] E. M. Wherry, *A Comprehensive commentary on the Qur'ân: comprising Sale's translation and preliminary discourse, with additional notes and emendations, together with a complete index to the text, preliminary discourse and notes,* 4 vols., London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, and Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1882-1884.

Arabic by the Protestant Christian Missionaries in Egypt and published under title: *Maqâlât fî al-Islâm.*

Meanwhile Marracci's as well as Sale's translation were in turn translated into other European languages. Mention has already been made of David Nerreter's translation of Marracci's work into German in 1703. In 1746 Theodor Arnold translated Sale's work into German.[1] And in 1751 M. Savary made a French version of Marracci's Latin translation under the title: *Le Coran, traduit de l.Arabe, accompagné de notes, etc.* The title page of one edition of this work states that it was published in Makka in 1165 H.[2] The claim is evidently false and it was made no doubt to impress its authenticity on the readers. The work proved, however, almost as popular as that of Sale and it went through several editions and reprints at Paris, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and London by various publishers in 1783, 1798, 1821-22, 1826, 1828, 1829, 1883, 1891, 1898, 1923, 1948, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1968 and even afterwards. Equally popular proved to be another French translation made by M. Kasimirski which was based on Sale's translation and which was published at Paris for the first time in 1840.[3] It also went through several editions and reprints by various publishers in 1842, 1843, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1852, 1857 and 1858. A further edition passed through at least twenty reprints well into our time, having been reprinted in 1948, 1952, 1959, 1970 and 1973. The 1970 edition contains a preface by Muhammad Arkoun. Kasimirski's work was used by Garber de Robles to make the first Spanish translation which was published in 1844;[4] and by L. J. A . Tollens to make a Dutch translation which was published in 1859.[5]

Thus throughout the eighteenth and the greater part of the nineteenth centuries translations of the Qur'ân in various European languages emanated mainly from the Latin work of Marracci and its alter-ego the English translation of George Sale. Other and more or less independent translations did of course appear during this long period. Mention may be made of these latter the German translations made by D. F. Megerlin (1772), F. E. Boysen (1773), S. F. G. Wahl (1828) and Dr. L. Ullmann (1840); the Hungarian translation made by Buziday Szedmajer (1831), the Polish translation made by J. M. Buczacki (1858) and the

[1] Theodor Arnold, *Der Koran, oder insgemein so gennante Alcoran des Mohammeds, etc.*, Lemgo, 1746.

[2] Pearson, *op.cit.*, p. 505.

[3] M. Kasimirski, *Civilisation musalmane. Observations historiques et crtiques sur le Mahométisme, traduites de l'anglais, de G. Sale, Le Koran, traduction nouvelle faite sur le texte arabe*, Paris, 1840.

[4] Gerber de Robles, *Al Koran, o domas civiles, morales, politicas y religiosas de los musalmanes, precedido de la viva de Mahoma. Traducio exactamente del original árabe por Mr Kasinirski, intérprete de la embajada fancesa en Persia. Version castellana*, Madrid, 1844.

[5] L. J. A. Tollens, *Mahomed's Koran, gevolgd naar de Fransche vertaling van Kasimirski, de Englesche van Sale, etc., Batavia, 1959.*

Swedish translation made by Frederik Crusenstople (1843). Nevertheless the scene was dominated during this period by Marracci and Sale. The general nature and spirit of all these translations may thus be understood by a little closer look into the work of George Sale.

III. Glimpses of Sale's Translation

The most remarkable thing about Sale is his stark hostility to the Qur'ân and Islam in which he surpassed all his predecessors, including Peter the Venerable, the bishop of Cluny, who had sponsored the first Latin translation of the Qur'ân in order to "refute" it. In fact Sale struck three notes in his preface which he captioned: "To the Reader". (a) He called the Qur'ân an "imposture"; (b) he considered all the previous translations "ignorant or unfair" which had given "too favourable an opinion" about the Qur'ân and (c) he stressed the need for an "impartial" translation to "undeceive" those who had been influenced by the previous translations and to "expose the imposture". He states: "But whatever use an impartial version of the Korân may be of in other respects, it is absolutely necessary to undeceive those who, from the ignorant or unfair translations which have appeared, have entertained too favourable an opinion of the original, and also to enable us effectually to expose the imposture; none of those who have hitherto undertaken that province, not excepting Dr Prideaux himself, having succeeded to the satisfaction of the judicious, for want of being compleat masters of the controversy."[1]

Sale's declared objective was thus to dislodge the Qur'ân by what he implied as his "impartial" translation. He also implied his complete mastery over the Qur'ân and Islam, accusing his predecessors of having lacked it and therefore having failed to dislodge the Qur'ân. The claim of "impartiality" is antithetical to the objective of attacking and killing the Qur'ân, and the claim of mastery over the subject is belied by his numerous mistakes and faults, some of which will be noted presently. And though he was sure that his translation would "expose" what he called an "imposture", he was not without misgivings about its positive and to him undesirable effects on the European readers. "They must have a mean opinion of the Christian Religion, or be but ill grounded in it, " he stated, "who can apprehend any danger from so manifest a forgery..." [2] He also stated that the Catholics, because of their "idolatry and other superstitions" had so far failed to refute Islam. He confidently asserted: "The Protestants alone are able to attack

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[1] Sale, *op. cit*, p. iii.
[2] *Ibid.*

the Korân with success; and for them Providence has reserved the glory of its overthrow."[1]

With such an objective Sale could not just be impartial, nor was he a "master" of the subject he dealt with. In fact his work itself was a grand imposture and forgery. His work was not original but an English rendering of Marracci's work which he guardedly indicated and which the subsequent orientalists amply exposed. He made false claims about his sources and reference works just as some of his contemporaries made false claims about his abilities. Thus Voltaire, who just eight years after the publication of Sales' translation had poured forth his venom against Islam and the Prophet in his *Mahomet,*[2] gave out that Sale had spent "five and twenty years in Arabia where he had acquired a profound knowledge of the Arabic language and customs".[3] This statement is palpably false and, as R. A. Davenport points out, is contradicted by the "stubborn evidence of dates and facts."[4] Sale was born in 1697 and he died in 1736, just two years after the publication of his translation. So he lived for just 39 years and could not therefore have lived twentyfive years in Arabia.

About his sources Sale states: " ... the manuscripts which I have made use of throughout the whole work have been such as I had in my own study, excepting the commentary of al-Beidawi and the Gospel of S. Barnabas."[5] The untruth of his having manuscripts on the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'ân is established by the list which the executor of his will published after his death two years afterwards when his library and collection were intact. The list was published under the following title: "A Choice Collection of Most Curious and Inestimable Manuscripts in the Turkish, Arabic and Persian Languages from the Library of the Late Learned and Ingenius Mr. George Sale". These were purchased in the first instance by the Rev. Thomas Hunt and they are now preserved in the Bodelian Library, Oxford. The British Museum also has a copy of the list of these manuscripts. "What is most significant", writes Sir E. Denison Ross who subsequently edited Sale's translation, "is the fact that it contains hardly any of the Arabic works and none of the commentaries which are referred to on every page of Sale's translation of the Koran."[6] The fact is that Sale simply copied

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1. *Ibid,* p. iv.
2. Published in 1742.
3. Quoted in Mohammad Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'ân and Orientalism,* London and New York, 1983, p. 65.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sale, *op. cit,* pp. vii-viii.
6. Quoted in Al-Hâj Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, *Translation of the Holy Qur-ân,* first edition, p. viii.

and translated the titles of the authorities cited by his predecessors, mainly Marracci in his Latin translation.

Similarly Sale reproduced all the faults and mistakes of Marracci in his translation and notes; and as the intention was to overthrow the Qur'ân, Sale spared no means to distort its meaning. The distortion was done in a number of ways, mainly, (a) paraphrasing; (b) deliberate mistranslation and also mistranslation due to (i) omission of words or expressions in the text from the meaning; (ii) lack of understanding of the correct meaning of some Arabic expressions, (iii) the use of Christian theological terms and concepts, (iv) and interpolation of words and expressions extraneous to the text and (c) faulty notes and comments. The whole work is replete with these faults. It is not feasible to mention and discuss all these within the scope of this chapter. Only a few are mentioned below by way of illustration.[1] It may be noted that a single instance often contains more than one of the faults indicated above.

To begin with Sale omits one of the two words, *al-Rahmân* and *al-Rahîm* from his translation of the first *'âyah* in the first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân, translating it as "In the name of the Most Merciful God"; and does so in all the cases where this compound phrase occurs throughout the Qur'ân. This is an instance of both omission and paraphrasing. Similarly the first phrase in the second *'âyah, al-hamdu-lillâh*, is translated as "Praise be to God", thus omitting the word *al* from the compound, which indicates comprehensiveness, as is pointed out by all the exegetes, so that the true meaning of the expression should be: "All the praise or all praises belong to Allah". The use of *al* here is intended also to imply an exclusion of all imaginary deities from adoration and praise. This omission of *al* from the translation and the consequent mistake in the meaning is committed by Sale in hundreds of places where this and similar phrases occur.

A more characteristic distortion of the meaning is his translation of *'âyah* 3 of *sûrah* 2. He translates the clause: *alladhîna yu'minûna bi al-ghayb wa yuqîmûna al-salâta* as: "who believe in the mysteries *of the faith,* who observe the appointed times of prayer ...". Here the word *al-ghayb* is purposely translated as *"mysteries of the faith",* thus introducing a phrase of Christian theology and also interpolating the expression "of the faith". There is no word in the text to stand for the expression "of the faith"; and the meaning of *al-ghayb* is "the unseen", not mysteries. Similarly the meaning of *yuqîmûna al-salâta* is not "observe the appointed times of prayer"

[1] See for a more detailed list *ibid.,* Introduction, pp. ix-xx, from which most of the examples given here are reproduced.

but simply "perform or duly perform the prayer". Another instance of twisting the meaning to conform to the Christian concept is Sale's translation of the clause at 2:87, *wa 'âtaynâ 'Îsâ ibn Maryam al-bayyinât* as "And gave evident miracles to Jesus the son of Mary". The plain meaning of "*al bayyinât* is "the clear signs" or "clear evidences", not clear miracles, and elsewhere Sale himself translates the word as such.

Even with regard to very simple words and expressions Sale distorts or alters the meaning. Thus, for instance, the concluding clause of *'âyah* 10 of *sûrah* 2, *bimâ kânû yakdhibûna*, is translated as "because they have disbelieved" instead of "because they used to tell lies". It cannot be assumed that Sale did not know the meaning of the word "*yakdhibûna*". Of course he did not know the correct meaning of many a word and phrase in the Qur'ân and definitely failed to understand the meaning of many *'âyahs*. An early instance is his failure to grasp the meaning of *'âyah* 17 of *sûrah* 2 to which he adds a note saying: "In this passage Muhammad compares those who believed not on him to a man who wants to kindle a fire, but, as soon as it burns up and the flames give a light, shuts his eyes, lest he should see. The sense seems to be here imperfect, and may be completed by adding the words, *He turns from it*, *shuts his eyes,* or the like."[1] There is no ambiguity or imperfection in the sense of the *'âyah.* It speaks about the *hypocrites* (*munâfiqûn*) and illustrates their position by a parable. The plain meaning of the *'âyah* is: "Their likeness is the likeness of one who kindled a fire; then, when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness, they not seeing." There is here no question of the person who lights the fire turning away his eyes or shutting his eyes as soon as the fire lights up. Allah takes away the light and they are left in the darkness unable to see anything. The sense is quite clear and there is no imperfectness in it requiring the addition of misleading words, as Sale does.

A graver instance of his not understanding the Arabic expression and of translating it according to his misunderstanding and then adding a still more preposterous note to it is what he does at 18:26. He translates the *'âyah* as: " Say, God best knoweth how long they continued there: unto him are the secrets of heaven and earth *known;* do thou make him to see and to hear." He does not know the meaning of the Arabic idiom *'abṣir bihi wa 'asmi'* (أبصر به و أسمع), which means "How best He sees and how best He hears", which is applied to Allah. Sale

[1] See for this and for the other instances cited any edition of Sale's translation under the *sûrah* and *'âyah* mentioned.

thinks that it is an order to the Prophet to make Allah to see and to hear and then adds a note to this expression saying: "This is an ironical expression intimating the folly and madness of man's presuming to instruct God." (Al-Beidawi and Jallaloddin). More remarkable is that he (or perhaps Marracci) falsely attributes this explanation to the commentators al-Baiḍâwî and Jalâlayn. He also wrongly writes Jallaloddin for Jalâlayn. Needless to say that these authorities give the correct meaning of the Arabic idiom here misunderstood by Sale and they do not give the comment he adds! If he had even understood the context here, which is the story of the Companions of the Cave, he could not have committed this blunder.

Often the interpolations are quite brief consisting of a word or two but they very effectively distort the meaning. Thus Sale translates the initial address at 2:21 as "O men *of Mecca*" while the text is simply "O men" or "O mankind". Again, the initial words at 2:143, *kadhâlika ja'alnâkum,* is translated as "We made you *O Arabians*" though "O Arabians" are nowhere in the text. Sale does these in order to show that the Qur'ân is meant for the men of Mecca or the Arabs. This he does at many places. Sometimes quite different a meaning is given for a word which changes the meaning of the *'âyah* as whole. Thus the initial clause of *'âyah* 2:148, *wa li-kullin wijhatun huwa muwallîhâ* (و لكل وجهة هو موليها) is translated as: "Every sect hath a certain tract *of heaven* to which they turn themselves *in prayer.*" The simple meaning of the clause is "everyone has a direction he turns to". The translation of the word *wijhah* as "a certain tract of heaven" is both strange and misleading. A more serious type of mistranslation is, for instance, his rendering of the initial clause of *'âyah* 2:212, *zuyyina lilladhîna kafarû al-hayât al-dunyâ* as: "The present life was ordained for those who believe not." No fair translator will ever translate the word *zuyyina* as "was ordained", i.e., decreed. It completely distorts the sense and subtly introduces the wrong concept of predestination in the *'âyah.* The simple meaning of the term is: "was embellished or beautified or made nice", not "ordained", with the implication of wrong doing on the part of the unbelievers. The same word he mistranslates in another form while translating the concluding clause of *'âyah* 10:12 , *kadhâlika zuyyina li al-musrifîna mâ kânû ya'malûna* (كذلك زين للمسرفين ما كانوا يعملون), as : "Thus was that which the transgressors committed prepared for them". Here *zuyyina* is translated as "was prepared", which is far from correct, in order to twist the meaning and to attribute their wrong-doing to an act of Allah. Another instance of this kind of distortion is his

translation of *'âyah* 64:2 as: It is he who hath created you and some of you is *predestined to be* an unbeliever; and *another* of you *is predestined to be* a believer; and God beholdeth that which you do." The interpolation of the phrase "predestined to be" twice in the *'âyah* is totally unjustified. There is nothing in the text to give this meaning. It is done simply to distort the meaning and to import the wrong notion of predestination into it..

Similarly the first part of *'âyah* 4:100 , *wa man yuhâjiru fî sbîlillâhi yajid fî al-'arḍi murâghaman kathîran* (و من يهاجر في سبيل الله يجد في الأرض مراغما كثيرا), as "Whosoever flieth from his country for the sake of God's true religion, shall find in the earth *many forced to do the same...*" Here the word *murâgham* is completely misunderstood and mistranslated as "forced to do the same", thus completely distorting the meaning of the clause. Its true meaning is "dwelling places". Again, the meaning of the first part of *'âyah* 4:161, *wa 'akhdhihim al-ribâ* (و أخذهم الربا), which speaks of the Jews' taking of usury – "And their taking of usury", is reversed by translating it as "And have given usury". A graver distortion is the translation of the clause *wa 'aqraḍtumu-llâha qarḍan ḥasanan* (و أقرضتم الله قرضا حسنا) of *'âyah* 5:12 as "And lend unto God on good usury" instead of the plain meaning "and lend a good loan to Allah". The obvious intention of this distortion is to show that the Qur'ân tolerates usury.

There are hundreds of such mistakes and distortions throughout Sale's translation of the Qur'ân. Indeed it would require an independent work to discuss most of them. Truly did E. H. Palmer, when he made a new translation of the Qur'ân,[1] remark that Sale's translation "can scarcely be regarded as a fair representation of the Qur'ân."[2] Nonetheless, Sale's translation remained in circulation and went through so many editions and reprints and was translated into several European languages mainly because it served the purpose of distorting and vilifying Islam and the Qur'ân.

IV. Translations of the late nineteenth century: Rodwell and Palmer

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the situation changed considerably. The European nations had by then established their imperial dominion over a number of Asian and African lands and had come into closer contacts with the Muslim populations of these lands. A number of Christian

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[1] See below, text.
[2] E. H. Palmer, *The Qur'ân,* Introduction; also quoted in *Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar,* op.cit, p. ix.

missionary societies had come into being and they had begun their Christianizing activities in these imperial dominions in a very extensive and systematic manner. These missionary activities were intellectually supported by a new phase of orientalism. In fact many of the new generation of orientalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were from among the ranks of the missionaries and their active supporters. The changed situation called for a change in technique and approach. Hitherto the translations of the Qur'ân and the orientalist writings in general had been meant essentially for European readers and the main purpose was to prevent the Europeans from being influenced by Islam. Now such writings were to be directed to the Muslims and other conquered peoples. It would therefore defeat the purpose to approach these peoples with an open declaration of hostility and an intention to overthrow their system, as Sale and his predecessors had done. A show of objectivity and impartiality became necessary. Also it was essential to attack Islam not with a superficial knowledge but with a more thorough knowledge of it. Above all, it was necessary to show not simply the supposed faults in Islam but the superiority and reasonableness of Christianity. All these factors gave rise to three new trends in the orientalist writings. Henceforth almost all the orientalists kept their real intention within themselves and declared at the outset of their writings their impartiality and objectivity. Secondly, they displayed a better acquaintance with the sources and had recourse to a more subtle twisting and misinterpretation of them. Thirdly, the main argument they advanced was that the Qur'ân and for that matter Islam was made up of ideas and precepts borrowed from Judaism and Christianity.

This phase of orientalism in the mid-nineteenth century was heralded by a new generation of orientalists of whom Aloys Sprenger, William Muir and Theodore Nöldeke are most important. The translations of the Qur'ân that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were greatly influenced by the writings of such orientalists and reflected the trends mentioned above.

Of these translations the first deserving mention is that of the Rev. J. M. Rodwell which was published for the first time in 1861 under caption: *The Koran: translated from the Arabic, the surahs arranged in chronological order, with notes and index.* Rodwell was influenced by the writings of the above mentioned orientalists, especially of Muir and Nöldeke. In a rather lengthy preface Rodwell discusses about the rise of Islam and of the Qur'ân and refers his readers to the works of Muir and Sprenger, among others.[1] More particularly he reproduces in the preface

Muir's opinions about the character and personality of the Prophet, his views about the Qur'ân and Qur'ânic *waḥy* and his theory of the Qur'ân and Islam being just an amalgam of bits from Judaism and Christianity.[2] In tune with him Rodwell writes that the Prophet presented a doctrine which is "Judaism divested of its Mosaic ceremonial, and Christianity divested of the Atonement and the Trinity – a doctrine ... fitted and destined to absorb Judaism, Christianity and Idolatry." Adding a footnote to this statement Rodwell writes: "A line of argument to be adopted by a Christian Missionary in dealing with a Muhammadan should be, not to attack Islam as a mass of error, but to show that it contains fragments of disjointed truth – that it is based upon Christianity and Judaism partially understood – especially the latter, without any appreciation of its typical character pointing to Christianity as a final dispensation.[3]

More importantly, he produced this translation by arranging the *sûrahs* in a chronological order rather than the order in which they are put in the original Qur'ân, as the title of his translation clearly states. In thus arranging the *sûrahs* in a new order Rodwell followed the lines indicated by Muir and Nöldeke. The obvious purpose was to give a confused view about the Qur'ân and to show that it consisted only of fragments of disjointed truth derived from Judaism and Christianity. Another intention was to prove that Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, was its author. All the previous orientalists had of course uniformly asserted this; but Rodwell's rearrangement of the *surahs* was aimed at proving this from the contents of the Qur'ân. In this design also he was influenced by Muir. In many of his notes Rodwell even suggested that the Prophet revised and recast the *'âyahs* and inserted them into the *sûrahs* as he thought proper and as the occasions demanded.

One effect of this awkward rearrangement of the *sûrahs* was that the work did not attain popularity comparable in any way to that of the previous translations; for educated Muslims, who were more or less conversant with the Qur'ân, looked on it with justifiable suspicion and dislike; and non-Muslims, who mostly did not know Arabic, found it hard to take it as a straightforward and easily understandable English rendering of the Qur'ân. It was also necessary for an

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[1] Rodwell, *The Koran,etc.,* London, 1861, preface, p. xxv.

[2] The theory of Jewish origin of the Qur'ân and Islam was propounded by Abraham Geiger in his work: *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthem aufgenommen?,* Bonn, 1833; but it was expanded into a Judaeo-Christian origin with much forced arguments and assumptions by Muir in his *Life of Mahomet.* The main faults and fallacy of the theory have been pointed out in M. M. Ali, op. cit., pp. 253-290.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. xxii.

inquisitive reader to have at hand the original Qur'ân as well as Rodwell's book if he wanted to compare the meaning of a *surah* in the latter with the text in the original Qur'ân. Even as an academic exercise it was futile; for the Qur'ân is an integrated whole which ought not to be disturbed and because the *sûrahs* cannot just be arranged chronologically. It is well known that the first five *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 96 which Rodwell places as the first were the first revelation. The rest of the *sûrah* was revealed at a later date. Also, most of the other *sûrahs* were revealed in parts at different times. There is no agreement among scholars as to the absolute chronological order of the different passages of the different *sûrahs*. Rodwell is quite aware of this fact. Thus in his note to *'âyah* six of *sûrah* 96, which is his first *sûrah,* he writes: "This, and the following verses, may have been added at a later period, though previous to the flight." Similarly in his note to *'âyah* 11 of *sûrah* 74 (*al-Muddaththir*) which he places as his second *sûrah* he says: "This portion of the *sûrah* seems to be of a different date from the first seven verses, though very ancient..."[1] Again in his note to *'âyah* 31 of the same *sûrah* he states: "This and the three following verses wear the appearance of having been inserted at a later period... perhaps at Medina."[2] Again in his note to *sûrat al-Fâtiḥah* which is the first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân but which he places as the eighth he says: "This *sura*, which Nöldeke places last, and Muir sixth, in the earliest class of Meccan *suras*, must at least have been composed prior to *Sura* xxxvii, 182, where it is quoted, and to *sura* xv, 87, which refers to it. And it can scarcely be an accidental circumstance that the words of the first, second, and fifth verses do not occur in any other *sura* of the first Meccan period as given by Noldeke, but frequently in those of the second, which it therefore, in Noldeke's opinion, immediately precedes. But this may be accounted for by its having been recast for the purposes of private and public devotion by Muhammad himself, which is the meaning probably of the Muhammadan tradition that it was revealed twice."[3]

The suggestions that *'âyas* 31-34 of *sûrat al-Muddaththir* had been perhaps inserted at Madina and that portions of *sûrat al-Fâtiḥah* had been recast by the Prophet himself for purposes of "private and public devotion" are wrong and mischievous, but the point to be noted is that Rodwell himself admits that in most cases different parts of a single *sûrah* were revealed at different times and that even among the orientalists themselves there was no agreement on the

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[1] Rodwell. *The Koran*, second edition, 1876, p. 4, note 4, quoted in Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, p. xxiv.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

matter. Thus the rearranging of *sûrahs* on the basis of their supposed dates of revelation is both unrealistic and futile. Even with regard to a book by an author the different chapters might have been written at different dates but they might not have been placed in the book in the order of their dates of composition. To rearrange the chapters of that book in the order of their known and supposed dates of composition and then to make a translation of it and present it to the public as a translation of that particular book by that particular author would be ridiculous and a height of folly. Rodwell's only purpose in doing so with regard to the Qur'ân is to confuse and to make room for indulging in all sorts of assumptions and speculations calculated to impart a distorted and unfavourable impression about the Qur'ân and Islam.

Even his translation as a whole is geared to that objective. He repeats at many places the same mistakes as committed by Sale. Thus like Sale, Rodwell fails to understand the meaning of the idiom *'abṣir bihi wa 'asmi'* in the *'âyah* 18:26 and translates it as "look thou and hearken unto him"! Again, like Sale, Rodwell mistranslates the *'âyah* 40:35 without regard to the stops as: "Those who gainsay the signs of God without authority having come to them, are greatly hated by God and by those who believe." The correct meaning is: "Those who dispute about the signs of Allah without any authority having come to them, very hateful is that in the sight of Allah and the believers."

And though Rodwell avoids unnecessary paraphrasing in the translation he makes it up by his explanatory notes. Thus, with regard to the first six *'âyahs* of *sûrah* 30 (*al-Rûm*) which he places as his 74th, he attempts to belittle the prophecy about the victory of the Romans and says in his note: "The Muhammadans appeal to this passage as a clear proof of the inspiration of their Prophet. But it should be borne in mind that the vowel points of the consonants of the Arabic word for *defeated* in verse 1, not being originally written, and depending entirely on the speaker or the reader, would make the prophecy true in either event, according as the verb received an active or passive sense in pronunciation. The whole passage was probably constructed with the view of its proving true in any event."[1] The whole passage was not constructed with the view of its proving true in any event; nor was it left to the discretion of the speaker or reader to give the verb an active or passive sense in pronunciation. The *'âyahs* were recited and given out immediately on their revelation in the same pronunciation as they have ever been

[1] Rodwell, *The Koran*, second edition, p. 217, quoted in *ibid*, p. xxv.

written, whether the vowel points were there or not. Also the unbelieving Quraysh leaders, on hearing these *'âyahs,* challenged the prophecy and betted to give one hundred camels if it ever came true. They ultimately lost the bet when the prophecy came true by the victory of the Romans a few years afterwards. Moreover, even if the verb in the first *'âyah* is given an active form it would be, according to Rodwell's own translation, a senseless and untrue statement running as: "The Greeks have defeated, In a land hard by: But after their defeat they shall defeat their foes." If, on the other hand, the verbs in both the *'âyahs* were changed respectively from the passive into active and vice versa, the sense would be unhistorical, for the Greeks (Romans) did not first gain a victory and were not afterwards defeated.[1] The prophecy would not be true in either event, as Rodwell attempts to mislead his reader.

Similarly he makes a very misleading and false statement in his note to *'âyah* 17:110 saying that the Prophet originally intended to combine the name *al-Raḥmân* with *Allah* but fearing that these would be supposed by the unbelievers to be two gods he dropped the name *al-Raḥmân* from the subsequent *sûrahs.*[2] How untrue the statement is may be seen from the fact that the formula *Bismillah al-Raḥmân al-Raḥîm* appears at the head of the 46 *sûrahs* which he places and translates after this *sûrah,* numbering it as 67 in his order of arrangement. Not only this. The name *al-Raḥman* occurs at *'âyah* 27:30 (*al-Naml*) which *sûrah* he places as his 68th; at *'âyah* 2:41 (*Fuṣṣilat*) which he places as his 71st; at *'âyah* 13:30 (*al-Ra'd*) which he numbers as *sûrah* 90; and at *'âyah* 2:163 (*al-baqarah*), which he places as his 91st. At all these places he translates the name as the "God of Mercy" or "the Compassionate". The fact is that in his eagerness to vilify the Qur'ân and the Prophet Rodwell fails to see the inconsistency and falsity of his statement.

The next English translation of the Qur'ân appearing in the nineteenth century was that by E. H. Palmer published in 1880 by the Oxford University in the series *Sacred Books of the East* edited by F. Max Muller. The translation is in two volumes constituting the sixth and ninth volume of the series. Max Muller did not know Arabic and he had no hand in the translation, his name being attached to it simply as the general editor of the series. The first volume contains the translation of *sûrahs* 1-16 and the second volume that of the rest. In an introduction occupying pages ix to lxxx Palmer gives an account of the rise of Islam and the

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[1] See al-Ṭabarî, *Tafsîr*, Pt. 21, p. 19.

[2] Rodwell, *The Koran*, second edition, p. 174, quoted in Ḥâfiz Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

circumstances of the people in whose midst the Qur'ân was revealed. This is followed by an "Abstract of the contents of the Qur'ân" occupying pages lxxxi - cxviii. It was reprinted in 1900 with an introduction by R. A. Nicholson in "The World's Classics" series and also subsequently several times in Britain, the U. S. A. and India.

The most important thing to note in connection with this translation is that Palmer, unlike his predecessors, considered the language of the Qur'ân as "rude and rugged" and "not elegant in the sense of literary refinement". He also thought that to "render it by fine or stilted language would be quite as foreign to the spirit of the original." He further stated: "I have rendered it word for word. Where a rugged or commonplace expression occurs in the Arabic I have not hesitated to render it by a similar English one, even where a literal rendering may perhaps shock the reader."[1]

With such an impression about the Qur'ân and the intention to render it literally even if it shocked the reader, it is easy to see that his translation would fail to be fair to the meaning and spirit of the Qur'ân. In fact the method of literal translation was adopted to distort the meaning as far as possible. Palmer also failed to grasp the meaning of many an Arabic idiom or purposely misconstrued it to show the supposed rudeness of the language. For instance he translates *'âyah* 2:273 (للفقراء الذين أحصروا في سبيل الله لا يستطيعون ضربا في الأرض) as: "The poor who are straitened in God's way and cannot knock about the earth" and then justifies his shocking phrase "knock about the earth" as the meaning of the Arabic idiom *darban fî al'arḍ* by a note in which he says: "I must again remind the reader of the remarks in the Introduction that the language of the Qur-ân is really rude and rugged, and that although the expressions employed in it are now considered as refined and elegant, it is only because all literary Arabic has been modelled on the style of the Qur-ân."[2] Thus, in order to prove the supposed rudeness of the language of the Qur'ân Palmer casts aspersion on the Arabic language as a whole and makes the language of his translation inelegant and rude.

Similarly he translates the *'âyah* 7:89 (ربنا افتح بيننا و بين قومنا بالحق و أنت خير الفاتحين) as : "O Lord, open between us and between our people in truth, for Thou art the best of those who open" and then in his note to this expression he says that it means "give us a chance."[3] Here Palmer completely misunderstands and misconstrues

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[1] E. H. Palmer, *The Qur'ân*, Introduction, p. lxxvii.
[2] Palmer, *The Qur'ân*, vol. I, p. 43.
[3] *Idid.*, p. 149.

the Arabic idiom. *Iftaḥ bynanâ* is an idiom meaning "Judge between us", not "give us a chance", as he so confidently asserts. The meaning of the idiom is very clearly given as such even in Lane's *Lexicon*[1] which was published at least a decade before Palmer penned his translation. He should also have noted that the prayer in question was that of Prophet Shu'ayb, peace be on him, after his people had finally rejected him. He could not simply have asked for another "chance" at that point of time in his mission. Palmer should have also noted that the adverbial expression *bi al-ḥaqq* – "in truth" – is applicable to judgement and not to giving a chance.

Another instance of his attempt to show the supposed rudeness of the language of the Qur'ân is his translation of the *'âyah* 9:61–

و منهم الذين يؤذون النبى و يقولون هو أذن قل أذن خير لكم يؤمن بالله و يؤمن للمؤمنين و رحمة للذين
ءامنوا منكم والذين يؤذون رسول الله لهم عذاب اليم

as: "And of them are some who are by the ears of the Prophet, and say, 'He is all ear.' Say, 'An ear of good for you!' he believes in God, and believes in those who do believe; but those who are by ears with the Apostle of God, for them is grievous woe." In a note to this *'âyah* he says that the expression "by the ears with the Prophet" means to "reproach or quarrel with" him and adds: "I have used the old-fashioned English expression in order to preserve pun upon the word ear, which exists in the original."[2] It needs only to be pointed out that in the old-fashioned English "pun upon the word ear" might mean to "reproach or quarrel", but the original Arabic word *yu'dhûna* at the beginning as well as at the end of the *'âyah,* which Palmer translates as "are by the ears", has nothing to do with "ear" (*'udhun*). It is an imperfect verb in the third person plural from *'âdhâ*, form IV from the root *'adhy*, and not from the root *'udhun* or ear. The meaning of the verb is "they hurt or cause bodily pain". Palmer here commits a grave mistake and in his attempt to ridicule the Qur'ân only renders his translation and the note ridiculous.

Indeed, to his rudeness Palmer adds carelessness. Thus in his translation of *'âyah* 12:65 the phrase *wa namîru 'ahlanâ* (and we will provide corn for our families) are left out; and the last clause of the following *'âyah* (12:66) is carelessly translated as : "God over what ye say has charge", thus changing the expression *naqûlu* (we say) into *taqûlu* (you say).[3] And in translating *sûrat al-Naḥl* (no. 16) he

[1] Lane's *Lexicon* was published in the late 1860's.
[2] Palmer, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 181.
[3] Palmer, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 226.

omits to translate its *'âyah* 85.[1] At times he skips over an imperative joining the clause that follows with the previous clause in such a way as gives a totally different sense to the *'âyah* as a whole. Thus he translates *'âyah* 29:46 as: "And do not wrangle with the people of the Book, except for what is better; save with those who have been unjust amongst them and *who say,* "We believe in what is sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and we are unto Him resigned."[2] Here Palmer skips over the imperative *wa qûlû* – "and you say" – replacing it with "who say", thereby making the clause that follows a saying of those who "have been unjust amongst" the People of the Book. Palmer here not only changes the meaning of the whole *'âyah,* he also fails to notice the inherent absurdity that if any group of the people of the Book said: "We believe in what is sent down to you etc." there would have been no question of wrangling with them. Like his predecessors Sale and Rodwell, Palmer also mistranslates the *'âyah* 40:35 as: "Those who wrangle concerning the signs of God without any authority having come to them are greatly hated by God and by those who believe."[3]

These are only a few instances by way of illustration. There are hundreds of such mistakes, omissions and mistranslations throughout the work.

V. Translations of the Twentieth Century: Bell and Arberry

Coming to the twentieth century we have two notable orientalist English translations of the Qur'ân, one by Richard Bell and the other by A. J. Arberry. They are described by an English scholar as "worthy successors to Rodwell and Palmer."[4]

Bell was truly a successor to Rodwell; for, like the latter, Bell also made his translation by rearranging the *sûrahs* according as he thought to be their chronological order. The full title of Bell's translation is: *The Qur'ân: Translated with a critical rearrangement of the Sûrahs.* It is in two volumes and was published for the first time in 1937-39 and was reprinted in 1960. Bell carried to the extreme Rodwell's assumption about the Prophet's having carried out revisions in the Qur'ân and he subsequently elaborated these assumptions in an independent work entitled *Introduction to the Qur'ân.*[5] As regards the translation itself it is geared

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1 Palmer, *op.cit.*,vii. I., p. 259.
2 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 122.
3 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 194.
4 *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature,* Vol. I., p. 505.
5 Edinburgh University Press, 1953. Subsequently edited by W.M. Watt and reprinted in 1970. See also *supra,* pp. 279-304.

to the same objective of imparting a distorted and unfavourable impression about the Qur'ân and contains numerous mistranslations and misinterpretations.

Arberry's translation also was in two volumes and published for the first time in 1955.[1] It was republished in "The World's Classics" by the Oxford University Press in 1964 and still subsequently published as a paperback volume in 1983 and afterwards. Arberry avoids the word "translation" and entitles his work :*The Koran Interpreted.* "I have called my version an interpretation", says he in his introduction, "conceding the orthodox claim that the Koran (like all other literary masterpieces) is untranslatable..."[2] He may be considered a successor to Palmer because, like the latter he pays special attention to the language of the Qur'ân though, unlike Palmer, he considers it sublime and inimitable. He also very categorically says that "the Koran as printed in the twentieth century is identical with the Koran as authorized by 'Uthmân more than 1,300 years ago", and that its "sublime rhetoric" and the "richly varied rhythms" constitute "the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind.... the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both."[3] Like Palmer, however, he attempts to give a literal translation and to reproduce the rhythm in it. He says: "I have striven to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings in correspondence with what the Arabic presents, paragraphing the grouped sequences as they seem to form original units of revelation."[4]

The last clause of the above statement of Arberry's indicates the format of his translation. Thus he groups together a number of consecutive *'âyahs* in a *sûrah* as a passage and gives their translation in a sequence. This is what he calls "grouped sequence". For instance, the first four *'âyahs* of *sûrat al-Fatiḥah* is translated as a passage, and the rest is translated as another passage. Similarly the first four *'âyahs* of *sûrat al-Baqarah* is translated as a passage, *'âyahs* five to nine as the next passage, *'âyahs* 10 to 14 as another passage, and so on. This format he adopts throughout his translation. Although this method does not disrupt the meaning of the *sûrah* as a whole, it makes it difficult for a reader not having a certain amount of knowledge in Arabic to identify how much of a passage of the translation represents the meaning of each *'âyah.* This is more so because he has not followed the standard numbering of the *'âyahs* but that of Flugel which is somewhat different. Arberry is also definitely wrong in his assumption that the *'âyahs* he

[1] Allen &Unwin Ltd, London, 1955.
[2] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, paper back edition,Oxford University Press, 1983, Introduction, p. xii.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. ix, x.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. x.

groups together as a passage or "the grouped sequences" as he calls them, "seem to form original units of revelation." His translation, though an improvement upon that of Palmer, contains many of the mistakes and misinterpretations characteristic of the orientalists. It is also difficult to understand many of the passages of the translation independently of the Arabic text. Some of these defects and mistakes may be mentioned under the following headings:

(a) **Employment of Christian theological terms that distort the real meaning:**

Thus he translates the phrase *yawm al-dîn* in the fourth *'âyah* of the first *sûrah* as "the Day of Doom" which is not quite correct a translation. Again he translates the word *furqân* at 2:53 as "salvation",[1] though the clear meaning of it is "distinguishment", "differentiation", "separation" and the like. Arberry is clearly influenced by Bell who wrongly suggests a Syriac origin for the word and gives the meaning of "salvation" to it.[2] Arberry very consciously gives this meaning to the word wherever it occurs in the Qur'ân, though it distorts the meaning at each place. Thus he translates the expression *yawm al-furqân* at 8:41 as "the day of salvation" and the title of *sûrat al-Furqân* (no. 25) as "Salvation", and also the same word in its first *'âyah*, where it clearly means the Qur'ân, as "Salvation".[3] Similarly he gives a twist to the meaning of *huwa alladhî 'ayyadaka bi-nasrihi* (هو الذي أيدك بنصره) at 8:62 as "He has confirmed thee with His help".[4] The plain meaning is He has "supported or strengthened you". The word "confirm", though it may sometimes be used in the sense of strengthening or supporting, is not quite appropriate here.

Equally purposeful is his translation of the first part of *'âyah* 14:27, *yuthabbitu-llahu alladhîna 'âmanû bi al-qawl al-thâbiti* (يثبت الله الذين ءامنوا بالقول الثابت) as "God confirms those who believe with the firm word."[5] The clear meaning of the word *yuthabbitu* is "he establishes or makes firm". The term "confirmation" has a very wellknown sense in Christian theology signifying "the rite by which people are admitted to full communion in many Christian churches", and to "confirm" means "to put through a ceremony to admit to full religious communion."[6] Again, a very significant twist is given in translating the initial clause of 16:102, *qul*

[1] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 3.
[2] R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London, 1926, p. 120.
[3] Arberry, *op. cit*, pp. 173, 362.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[6] *Chambers Dictionary*, New Edition, 1999, p. 344.

nazzalahu rûḥ al-quds min rabbika (قل نزله روح القدس من ربك)as "Say: The Holy Spirit sent it down from thy Lord."[1] The term *rûḥ al-quds* is another name for the angel Jibrîl and he is meant here. But Arberry gives a double twist here. He capitalizes the two initial letters of the two words, H and S, so as to make it conform to the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit, and he translates *nazzala* as "sent down" though it also means "brought down" and which is the sense here, especially as the phrase "form your Lord" follows it.

(b) **Direct distortion of the meaning:**

A glaring instance of this type is his translation of the first part of *'âyah* 7:157 (الذين يتبعون الرسول النبى الأمى.........) as: "those who follow the Messenger, *the Prophet of the common folk*, whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel, *bidding them to honour and forbidding the dishonour...*"[2] Here he wilfully translates the phrase *al-Nabî al-ummîy* as "the Prophet of the common folk" in order to conceal the significant fact that this *'âyah* clearly speaks of him as an unlettered person, the meaning of *'ummîy* being unlettered. He repeats the same mistranslation at the following *'âyah* where this very phrase occurs.[3] At both these places he also disregards the grammatical rule, the phrase being in the form of *sifah* and *mawsûf*, the word *'ummîy* being a description of the Prophet and in the singular. But Arberry makes the translation in the genitive sense, saying "the Prophet of the common folk", which is totally wrong. He also cleverly uses the term "folk" which is used for both singular and plural; and he uses it in the plural sense and similarly mistranslates the word *'ummîy* at the other places in the Qur'ân, 2:78, 3:20, 3:75 and 62:2 where it is in the plural .[4]

It is to be noted that in his translation of the *'âyah* 7:157 quoted above he translates the phrase (يأمرهم بالمعروف و ينهاهم عن المنكر) *ya'muruhum bi al-ma'rûf and yanhâhum 'an al-munkar* as "bidding them to honour and forbidding dishonour". The plain meanings of the words *al-ma'rûf* and *al-munkar* are respectively "the approved or recognised" and "the disapproved or unrecognised" things. They do not mean "honour" and "dishonour". Throughout his translation Arberry has used "honour" and "dishonour" wherever these phrases occur, thus distorting the meanings at every place. It is not known whether he has taken these senses from

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1 Arberry, *op.cit.*, p. 270.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 162
4 *Ibid*, pp. 10, 47, 56 and 563.

R. Bell or A. Jeffery who are bent on relating as many words as possible of the Qur'ân to Syriac and Hebrew origins.

The instance cited above about the meanings given to the expressions *al-ma'rûf* and *al-munkar* are only characteristic of Arberry's taking liberty in giving his own meanings to many words distorting the sense of the *'âyahs* concerned. Thus he translates the phrase *yamudduhum* (يمدهم)at 2:15 as "shall lead them on".[1] *Yamuddu* means "he extends" or "gives rein to"; it does not mean "shall lead them on", which completely distorts the meaning of the clause. Similarly he translates the phrase *tazâharûna 'alayhim* (تظاهرون عليهم)at 2:85 as "conspiring against them."[2] *Tazâharûna* means "you (all) assist or give support against them", not "conspire against them". The phrase *'a'izzah 'alâ al-kâfirîn* at 5:54 is translated as "disdainful towards the unbelievers".[3] The plain meaning of the phrase is "stern or tough against the unbelievers", not "disdainful towards the unbelievers". This meaning gives a completely altered sense to the clause.

Again, the clause (و قولوا حطة نغفر لكم خطاياكم) *wa qûlû hittatun naghfir lakum khatâyâkum* in 2:58 is translated as : "and say, Unburdening; We will forgive you your transgressions."[4] Here the word stands for "seek forgiveness" and is a conditional clause of which the conclusion is "We will forgive you..." Arberry translates the expression *hittah* as Unburdening, writing it with a capital letter and putting a semicolon after it. This makes the sense unintelligible, violates the grammatical form of its being a conditional clause and makes the clause "We will forgive you" appear as an independent statement rather than the conclusion of the conditional clause. If Arberry was careful to note that the expression *wa qûlû hittah* is a condition of which the conclusion is "We will forgive you..." he could not have given the awkward meaning to *hittah* , whatever might have been his source for giving this meaning to the word. He repeats the same thing at 7:161 where the expression occurs again.[5] It is also noteworthy that in the above mentioned clause he translates the phrase *khatâyâkum* as "your transgressions". *Khatâyâ* means sins, mistakes, faults, not transgressions.

Even very commonly used phrases as(فصلنا الآيات) *fassalnâ al-'âyât* or *nufassilu al-'âyat* have always been given a distorted meaning as "We have distinguished the signs" or "We distinguish the signs".[6] The plain meaning of the words *fassalnâ* or

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 7
[5] *Ibid.*, o. 162.

nufassilu is "we elucidate, explain, elaborate, spell out" and the like. It does not mean "we distinguish". It is easy to see how this meaning gives a different sense to the clause or *'âyah* in which it is used. Similarly he translates the expression : *ja'alakum khalâ'if al-'arḍ* (جعلكم خلائف الأرض) in 6:165 (*Surt al-'An'âm*) as "appointed you viceroys in the earth".[2] The plain meaning of *khalâ'if* is "successors", not "viceroys". Again he translates the expression: *Wa yâ 'Âdamu-uskun 'anta wa zawjuka al-jannata* (ويا آدم اسكن أنت و زوجك الجنة) at 7:19 (*Sûrat al'A'râf*) as: "O Adam, inherit, thou and thy wife, the Garden".[3] The plain meaning of *uskun* is "you dwell", not "inherit." In this way numerous words are arbitrarily translated to distort the meanings.

(c) **Mistakes due to failure to understand the Arabic expression:**

Sometimes he fails to understand an idiom and gives an arbitrary meaning to it. Thus he translates the idiom (سقط فى أيديهم) *suqiṭa fî 'aydîhim* in the initial clause of *'âyah* 7:149, *wa lammâ suqita fî 'aydîhim,* as: "And when they smote their hands..."[4] *Suqiṭa fî yadihi* is an idiomatic expression meaning : to be at a loss, to be bewildered, to stand aghast, and the like. "To smite the hand" is no English idiom giving a similar meaning. Even a literal translation of the Arabic words would be "it was fallen in their hands", the initial verb being in the passive voice, not "they smote their hands". To smite means to hit hard or to strike. This word has no relationship in meaning to the Arabic word *saqaṭa,* which means: he or it fell.

Similarly he fails to grasp the meaning of the idiom *'an yadin* in the last clause of *'âyah* 9:29 and translates it as :"out of hand"; while the correct meaning of the idiom is "in submission". Again he misunderstands the idiomatic clause at the beginning of 21:64, (فرجعوا الى أنفسهم) *faraja'û 'ilâ 'anfusihim,* and translates it as : "So they returned one to another",[5] which is confusing and unintelligible. The plain meaning of the expression is that "they reflected". Even a literal translation, "they returned to themselves", would mean that they reflected and thought about their own position. Again, he translates the first clause of the *'âyah* 10:11 (*Sûrat Yûnus*) و لو يعجل الله للناس الشر استعجالهم بالخير: *wa law yu'ajjillu-llâhu li al-nâsi al-sharra isti'jâlahum bi al-khayr,* as: "If God should hasten unto men evil as they would hasten good."[6]

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[1] See for instance the translations of *'âyahs* 6:126, 7:32 and 7:52, *ibid.*, pp. 136, 146 and 149 respectively.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 146.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 144.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

The correct meaning is: "And were Allah to hasten for men the evil as the hastening to them of the good".

In the same way Arberry fails to understand or disregards the correct meaning of the clause: (و ما أريد أن أخالفكم)*wa mâ 'urîdu 'an 'ukhâlifakum* in 11:88 (*Sûrat* Hûd) and translates it as: "and I desire not to come behind you".[2] The correct meaning of the expression *'ukhâlifu* is "I oppose, differ, contradict, and the like," not "I go behind you". Again, he translates the expression : *innamâ 'anta mundhir wa li-kulli qawmin hâd* (انما أنت منذر و لكل قوم هاد) at 13:7 (*Sûrat al-Ra'd*) as "Thou art only a warner, and a guide to every people."[3] The correct meaning is. " Thou are only a warner; and for every people there is a guide." Arberry fails to recognise or disregards the fact that the expression : *wa li-kulli qawmin hâd* is not a description of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) but an independent sentence stating another fact.

These are some instances of this type of mistake in his translation.

(d) **Addition to or omission from the original :**

Often an additional clause is added in the translation though it is not in the original. A gross instance of this is his translation of 11:25, *wa laqad 'arsalnâ Nûhan 'ilâ qawmihi innî lakum nadhîrum-mubîn* (و لقد أرسلنا نوحا الى قومه اني لكم نذير مبتن) as: "And We sent Noah to his people: ' I am for you a warner and a bearer of good tidings."[4] There is nothing in the original here for the addition "and a bearer of good tidings"; while the adjective *mubîn* (open and clear) is left out of the translation.

Similarly he translates the expression: (فاذا جاء وعد الأخرة ليسوؤا وجوهكم) *fa 'idhâ jâ'a wa'd al-'âkhirati li-yasû'û wujûhakum* in 17:7 (*Sûrat al-'Isrâ'*) as: "Then, when the promise of the second came to pass, We sent against you Our servants to discountenance you".[5] The plain translation of the expression is "Then when the promise for the second came in order that they might disgrace your faces". There is nothing here in the original for the words "We sent against you Our servants" which is Arberry's interpolation. It is also to be noted that the meaning of the expression *li-yasû'û wujûhakum* is "that they might disgrace or disfigure your faces", not "to discountenance you", as Arberry puts it.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 197.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 240
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 214.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

Again, the expression: (و لا يعصينك فى معروف فبايعهن واستغفر لهن) *wa lâ ya'ṣînaka fî ma'rûfin fa bâyi'hunna wastaghfir lahunna* in 60:12 (*Sûrat al-Mumtaḥinah*) is translated as: "nor disobey thee in aught honourable, ask God's forgiveness for them".[1] Here, not to speak of the word "honourable" as the meaning of *ma'rûf,* the expression *fa bâyi'hunna* (then "take their oath of fealty) occurring in the original is omitted from the translation.

Such addition to and omission from the original is committed at many places in the translation.

(e) **Mistakes due to carelessness:**

Sometimes words are carelessly read and hence translated wrongly. Thus he translates the last clause of the *'âyah* 30:22 (ان في ذلك لآيات للعالمين) *'inna fî dhâlika la-'âyâtil lil-'âlimîn*, as "Surely in that are signs for all living beings."[2] Clearly he takes the word *'âlimîn*, which is the accusative form of *'âlimûn* meaning "men of knowledge" as *'âlamîn,* meaning "all beings". Another instance is his translation of the first part of the *'âyah* 9:64 (يحذر المنافقون أن تنزل عليهم سورة تنبئهم بما في قلوبهم)which he translates as: "The hypocrites are afraid, lest a sura should be sent down against them, telling thee what is in their hearts..."[3] Here the words "telling thee" should be "telling them", for the expression in the original is *tunabbi'uhum*, not *tunabbi'uka.* The translation completely alters the sense of the *'âyah* as a whole. Even the titles of *sûrahs* are carelessly translated. Thus *sûrah* 60, which is called *sûrat al-Ghâfir* or *sûrat al-Mu'min* is translated by Arberry as "The Believers."[4] He overlooks the fact that this *sûrah* is called *al-Mu'min* or "The Believer" with reference to its *'âyah* 28 which speaks about "a believing man among the people of Fir'awn" and not with reference to "Believers" in general. He also overlooks the fact that *sûrah* 23 is called "The Believers", which title he correctly translates as such but fails to see that two *sûrahs* could not have been given the same name.

Besides these, inaccurate and remote meanings are given for many well-known words giving distorted or derogatory senses. Thus *'ajr* (reward, recompense) is more often translated as "wage"[5] ; *al-ba'th* (resurrection) is translated as "Uprising"[6] which word is susceptible of quite a different meaning than

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 579.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 413.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 186.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 481-490
[5] See for instance *ibid.*, pp. 232, 405.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

resurrection; *mithqâla dharrah* (the weight of an atom) is translated as "the weight of an ant";[1] *'a'jamî* (a non-Arab) is translated as "a barbarian";[2] *mursalîn* (Messengers) is translated as "Envoys";[3] *tuftanûna* (you are tried/tested) is translated as "you are being proved";[4] and so on.

The above is not a comprehensive list of the mistakes and distortions in the translation as a whole. They are only some specimens. On the whole Arberry's translation is calculated to distort and give a very biased impression about the Qur'ân

VI. OTHER MAIN EUROPEAN TRANSLATIONS

Of the other main European translations mention may be made of the French translation made by R. Blachère, *Le Coran. Traduction nouvele*, published in 1947-50. It was reprinted in 1957, 1959, 1966 and 1972. Another French translation with notes is that of D. Masson, *Le Coran,* with a preface by J. Grosjean, published in 1967. A new edition of it was published in 1980. Of the translations in German two were published in 1901, one made by Theodor F. Grigull, *Der Koran*, and the other by Max Henning, *Der Koran. Aus den Arabischen ubertragen etc.* A new edition of this work with an introduction and notes by Annemarie Schimmel was published at Stuttgart in 1960 and reprinted in 1962. Another edition of it with an introduction by Ernst Warber and Kurt Rudolph, and with notes and index was published in 1968. This edition was reprinted in 1974 and 1979. Another German translation is that of Lazarus Goldschmidt, *Der Koran, etc.,* which was first published in 1916 and was reprinted in 1923. During 1963-1971 was published another German translation of the Qur'ân in three volumes by Rudi Paret.

Of the translations in other European languages mention may be made of the Italian translations made by Aquilio Fracassi, published in 1914; by Luigi Bonelli, published in 1929 and republished in 1940 and 1948; by Alessandro Bussani, published in 1955 and another edition published in 1961; and by Mario Moreno, published in 1967 and reprinted in 1969. A number of translations were made also in Spanish both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The most notable of these are : one by Rafael Cansinos Assens, which was published in 1951 and which went through as many as six editions; another by Dr. Juan Vernet, which was published in 1963 and which went through a number of

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1 In *'âyah* 10:61,*ibid.*, p. 204.
2 *'Âyah* 26:198, *ibid.*, p. 380.
3 *Âyah* 26:21, *ibid.*, p. 371.
4 *'Âyah* 27:47, *ibid.*, p. 386.

editions; another by J. Gracia-Bravo, which was published at Barcelona as well as in Mexico in 1972; and another with notes by Julio Cortés, published in 1979. Of the several Swedish translations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the one by A. Ohlmarks and published in 1961 may also be mentioned in this connection.

All these translations suffer from the usual orientalist bias and they contain similar mistakes, distortions and misinterpretations.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

It would be clear from the foregoing discussion that the orientalists leave no stone unturned to assail the Qur'ân. This attempt of theirs has been going on since the beginning of orientalism in the late middle ages. In modern times, however, the main lines of assault have been laid down in the mid-and late-nineteenth century mainly by William Muir and Theodore Nöldeke. It is mostly their assumptions and theories that have been adopted, enlarged and reiterated by the subsequent orientalists.

The main manoeuvre has been to prove by one device or another that the Qur'ân is a composition of the Prophet's. This stance of the orientalists is in fact no different from the attitude of the Makkan unbelievers, whose immediate reaction and allegation was the same; but the modern orientalists employ the technique of modern research and a variety of arguments and assumptions to prove their case. Broadly, they direct their assault on two fronts – against the nature of the Qur'ân as a divinely revealed scripture and against its history and text. The aim in both cases is to show that it is a composition of the Prophet's or of some later hands. A second motive of theirs, in so as their discussion about the history of the Qur'ân is concerned, is to bring down the Qur'ân to the level of the Bible; for it is now generally acknowledged that the various books of the Old Testament and the gospels of the New Testament were written down at later times by different individuals. The orientalists in fact acknowledge this motive of theirs when they say that the Qur'ân also has a "history" just as the Bible has one.

The suggestion of the Prophet's authorship of the Qur'ân is made both directly and indirectly. As regards the direct allegation the orientalists adopt three main lines of arguments. One, they allege that the Prophet was an ambitious person who intended to play the role he subsequently played and made careful preparations for the purpose including the cultivation of poetical skill for giving out the Qur'ân. The originators of this allegation were Muir and Margoliouth; and it was taken up by other orientalists. To this allegation were added other elements, namely, that Muḥammad (p.b.h.) was concerned about the socio-religious and economic conditions of his people and decided to reform them; and this he could best do by means of a new religion and by assuming the role of a Prophet. He did not embrace either Judaism or Christianity because doing so would mean subservience to either the Persian or the Byzantine Empire

with which these two religious systems were closely linked and he was far too great a patriot to succumb to that position. Hence he gave himself out as a Prophet, devised a "national" religion and delivered the Qur'ân embodying the teachings and rules of the new religion.

The arguments and assumptions used by the orientalists to support this explanation of the rise of Islam and Muhammad's (p.b.h) alleged authorship of the Qur'ân have been examined one by one and it has been shown that these are all untenable and unreasonable.[1]

A second plea of the orientalists is that the Prophet was not *'ûmmîy* or unlettered as is given out and that he at least knew reading and writing enough to carry on business activities. The main advocate of this plea is W. M. Watt who suggests that the "myth" of the Prophet's "illiteracy" has been created later by Muslims to prove the miraculous nature of the Qur'ân. The arguments and assumptions in this respect have also been thoroughly analyzed and it has been shown that the assumption of later Muslims' having invented the myth of the Prophet's "illiteracy" is totally wrong; for the Qur'ân itself bears an eloquent testimony to this fact. It has further been shown that Watt blatantly misinterprets the relevant Qur'ânic passages and that he is wrong in his assertion that the term *'ummîy* only means a person or persons who have no *scripture*.[2]

The third plea or allegation of the orientalists is that the Prophet borrowed his ideas and information from Judaism and Christianity and made a new religion by mixing them up with some pagan Arab elements and gave his Qur'ân gradually, acquiring at the same time more information about the two above mentioned religions. The allegation is general with almost all the orientalists. It was spelt out clearly in the mid-nineteenth century by William Muir and ever since his time subsequent orientalists have repeated and elaborated it. The assumptions and arguments adduced to sustain the theory have been closely examined and found to be both irrational and untrue. It has been seen that the most that the orientalists suggest is that the Prophet had acquired only a superficial and second-hand knowledge about the two systems; and it has been pointed out that no sensible and intelligent person, as the Prophet by all accounts was, would have ventured to propound a new religion only on the basis of such a second-hand and superficial knowledge of a couple of other religious systems. Moreover, it has been emphasized that the Qur'ân, and for that matter the Prophet, does not deny

[1] See *supra*, pp. 7-15.

[2] *Supra*, pp. 15-25.

the link with the previously revealed scriptures. On the contrary, it repeatedly asserts that Allah's message delivered through the succession of past Prophets has always been the same, that this message has been corrupted and adulterated by human interference, particularly with regard to Judaism and Christianity and that the Qur'ân revives, completes and confirms the same message of Allah shorn of the corruption and accretions made to it. Far from concealing its link with the prevailing Judaism and Christianity the Qur'ân in fact challenges their authenticity and claims to deliver the true and authentic message of Allah, stressing that as God is One, there cannot be different "religions" for different groups and races. Most important of all, it has been shown by a comparison of the stories of a number of the Prophets as given in the Bible and the Qur'ân that the accounts in the latter differ in substantial ways from those given in the former and that therefore the allegation of the orientalists that the Prophet heard these stories from bazaar gossips and travelling traders and incorporated them in the Qur'ân is totally baseless and untenable. The orientalists simply ignore or avoid the important fact of the unity of Allah's message through all the Prophets and the undeniable corruption of the previous scriptures, and, instead, labour impressively but irrationally to convince their readers that Muhammad (p.b.h.) preached a new religion and gave out a new scripture simply by borrowing some ideas and facts from others![1]

This absurd proposition is even pedanticised by Watt who incorporates it in his theory of environmental influences upon the Prophet. Watt not only reiterates the alleged Judaeo-Christian influence upon the Prophet but even suggests that the contemporary scientific errors, particularly those relating to the sky and the earth, were introduced in the Qur'ân. Further, Watt attempts to befool the readers by repeating the usual Christian apology with regard to the scientific errors in the Bible that it was not necessary for the purpose of delivering God's message to rectify such errors! This and other unreasonable assumptions of Watt and his utter misinterpretations of the Qur'ânic passages in this connection have been demonstrated and it has been shown that far from incorporating the alleged scientific errors the Qur'ân contains such surprising statements and pointers to scientific facts as are being unveiled only by modern research and as could by no means have been available at the Prophet's time.[2]

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[1] See *supra*, pp. 26-61.

[2] See *supra*, pp. 88ff.

The indirect allegation of the Prophet's authorship of the Qur'ân is contained in the orientalists' treatment of the Qur'ânic *waḥy*. In fact the allegation cannot be sustained without disposing of the phenomenon of *waḥy*. Therefore the orientalists devote a good deal of attention to it. In doing so they generally adopt a secularist stance and completely disregard the fact that the Bible very much speaks of God's communications to His Prophets through the angel Jibrîl. In the case with Muhammad (p .b. h.), thus, they treat such a phenomenon as unnatural and unreasonable and attempt to explain it away in various ways. On assumption, based mainly on the medieval allegation of the Prophet's having been the victim of the disease of fainting fitness, is that the revelations were his "trance utterances". This theory was propounded by Muir. Subsequent orientalists are shy of making the direct allegation of disease, but they do nonetheless make use of Muir's suggestion. Specially Margoliouth and Watt build upon it their theory of the Prophet's having allegedly acquired the habit of inducing the symptoms of revelation. A second assumption, related to Carlyle's suggestion of the Prophet's sincerity, is that though he sincerely believed himself to be in receipt of God's communications, he was not correct in that belief and that it was more or less a psychological phenomenon with him. A third assumption, made by Margoliouth on the basis of Podmore's thesis, is that the Prophet, though sincere, could at the same time be deceitful and that the matter of *waḥy* was a deceit from first to last. A fourth assumption, also made by Margoliouth, is that the Prophet was not aware of angels nor of Jibrîl till he migrated to Madina and that therefore the latter was introduced as bearer of *waḥy* only at Madina. A fifth assumption related to the last mentioned one and made also by Margoliouth on a misinterpretation of the Qur'ânic passage 53:5-12 is that the Prophet initially claimed to have seen God but subsequently realized his mistake and mystified the claim and introduced the angel instead. These latter two assumptions are taken over by Bell and his pupil Watt. Bell further misinterprets the above mentioned Qur'ânic passage and Watt dissects and grossly misinterprets al-Zuhrî's report on the coming of *waḥy* into a number of separate reports for the sake of sustaining the theory of the "vision of God" by the Prophet. Last but least, Watt advances a theory of "intellectual locution" about *waḥy,* based on the work of A. Poulain on mystical theology.

All these assumptions and conjectures are made to confuse the issue of *waḥy* and to prove that the Qur'ânic texts issued in some form or other from the

knowledge and mind of the Prophet. These assumptions, conjectures and misinterpretations of the texts have been meticulously examined and analysed and it has been shown that each and everyone of these assumptions and theories is unreasonable, wrong and untenable.[1]

To the same end of demonstrating the Prophet's alleged authorship of the Qur'ân are directed the orientalists' discussions about its history and text. So far as the history of the Qur'ân is concerned the orientalists fall into two broad groups. The earlier generations of them, while generally holding that the Prophet gave out the Qur'ân, suggest (a) that though he had the texts of the revelations written down, he did not do so systematically in all cases; (b) that therefore some of what he gave out might have been forgotten or lost; (c) that he did not collect and collate the texts of the revelation in one compilation during his life-time; (d) that this was done after his death, not by 'Abû Bakr (r.a.) in the first instance as the report says but by 'Uthmân (r.a.); (e) that this compilation was made partly from written records and partly from people's memory and, (f) that 'Uthmân's compilation was thus not complete but something must have been left out. Further, supposed and arbitrary dates are assigned to different passages and *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân. All these lines of approach were laid down in the late nineteenth century by Theodore Nöldeke and subsequent orientalists have generally adopted and elaborated them, piling assumptions upon assumptions. Particularly his statement about the alleged incompleteness of the 'Uthmânic Qur'ân and the existence of copies of written texts of the Qur'ân with a number of the Prophet's Companions has been inflated by Arthur Jeffery into a theory of the existence of variant and different texts of the Qur'ân.

These assumptions and conjectures have been examined and shown to be both unreasonable and untenable. Specially it has been shown that the Prophet had not only had the texts of the revelations written down but had himself memorized them and required his followers to do so. He did not forget anything and used to recite the whole Qur'ân as far as revealed before the angel Jibrîl in the month of Ramaḍân each year; and he did so twice during the last year of his life. He also arranged the separately revealed passages into *sûrahs* and arranged the order of the *sûrahs* according to divine guidance received in this respect. The orientalists' assumption that the Qur'ân was not collected in one compilation during the time of the Prophet's immediate successor 'Abû Bakr (r.a.) is both

[1] See *supra*, chaps. IV-VII.

incorrect and unreasonable. They are also wrong in their supposition that something was collected from memory and something from written records. The reports about the compilation, particularly that of Zayd ibn Thâbit who was one of the Prophet's writers and who was directly involved in the task of compilation, very specifically states that nothing was included in the compilation unless it was corroborated simultaneously by the written records and from memory or by two independent witnesses. The work done during 'Uthmân's time was not the first compilation but copies made from the compilation made during 'Abû Bakr's time after streamlining the variations in vocalization and recitation that had crept up at the time, for the purpose of sending them to the different provinces which came into existence only after 'Abû Bakr, during the times of his successors 'Umar and 'Uthmân. On the whole the collection of the Qur'ân in one compilation was accomplished in the presence and with the assistance and co-operation of the principal Companions of the Prophet and on close comparison of the written records with the memorized texts. There was thus no question of anything being left out; and nothing was in fact left out. Nöldeke's surmise that 'Uthmân's Qur'ân was not complete is utterly wrong without any evidence whatsoever in its support. Also the theory of the existence of variant copies (*maṣâḥif*) of the Qur'ân is wrong. The few variant words and phrases so far tabulated are not gleaned from any copy of a *muṣḥaf* (codex) as such but from reports found in various commentaries. The veracity and authenticity of these reports have neither been looked into nor determined. Similarly Nöldeke's and others' arbitrary dating of the Qur'ânic passages and *sûrahs* are merely conjectural, unsubstantiated and untenable.[1]

The other and later group of the orientalists headed by Wansborough, Cook Crone, Yahuda De Nevo and others base their assumptions about the history of the Qur'ân on their predecessor orientalists' view about the sources of Islamic history, particularly that of Goldziher and Schacht regarding the authenticity of the reports (*ḥadîth*), and advance a theory of the gradual evolution of the Qur'ân during the second-third century of Islam. This "revisionist" view is so preposterously wrong that it has been denounced and rejected by the more sober section of the orientalists themselves. The assumptions and arguments of this revisionist school have also been examined and their unreasonableness and untenability have been laid bare.[2]

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[1] See *supra*, chaps. VIII and IX.

[2] See *supra* ch. X.

Both groups of the orientalists, however, attempt to bring down the Qur'ân at par with the Bible, or, as they say, the Qur'ân has a "history" just as the Bible has a "history". This latter trend is in fact an outcome of the orientalists' experience with regard to the Bible. The textual study of the Bible and its reinterpretation were necessitated by a realization during as early as the nineteenth century of the conflict of many scientific data with Biblical statements and it came gradually to be acknowledged that "the Books of the Bible were written by a variety of human beings in a variety of circumstances and cannot be accorded a verbal divine authority."[1] The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) reaffirmed that position and accepted the fact that the Books of the Old Testament contain material that is imperfect and obsolete.[2] As the orientalists admit directly and indirectly, the attempts to subject the Qur'ân to their brand of "textual study" is to bring it down to the level of the Bible; but the circumstances that have led the Christians to their revised view about the Bible do not apply to the case of the Muslims; for there is no conflict between science and Qur'ân nor are they anywhere under the thraldom of the Church, as were the people of Europe under the Medieval Papacy.

As regards the text of the Qur'ân, a number of assumptions and statements have been made. As in the case of the history of the Qur'ân, so in this respect also the main lines of assumptions were laid down by Nöldeke. Broadly these assumptions are: (a) That the greater part of the Qur'ân is prosaic, "much of it indeed is stiff in style"; (b) that it is not poetical but rhetorical; and "the rhyme is regularly maintained, although, specially in the later pieces, after a very slovenly fashion." Yet, inconsistently enough, it is stated that there is "gross negligence of the rhyme in the Koran"; (c) that there are sudden changes in subjects and themes; (d) that as regards the stories of the Prophets links in the sequence of events are omitted and "nowhere do we find a steady advance in the narration"; and (e) that the Prophet, who was "indebted to the instruction of the Jews and Christians" could not "fully express his new ideas in the common language of his countrymen" and had to make "free use" of Jewish, Christian and foreign words. Subsequent orientalists built further assumptions on these remarks of Nöldeke. Specially Bell and Watt based their theory of revision of the Qur'ân by the Prophet on the basis of what is supposed to be sudden changes in subjects and themes and break in the rhyme; and A. Jeffery prepared his work on the "Foreign

[1] J. Hicks, ed,. *The Myth of God Incarnate*, S C M Press, London, 1978, Preface.

[2] See Maurice Bucaille, *What is the Origin of Man*, Seghers, Paris, 1988, p. 15.

vocabulary of the Qur'ân" on the basis of the assumption that the Prophet could not fully express his new ideas in the common language of his countrymen".

These views and assumptions also have been closely scrutinised and shown to be unreasonable and untenable. It has been pointed out that Nöldeke's assumptions about the sudden changes in subjects and the language and style of the Qur'ân is due to his lack of understanding of the basic theme of the Qur'ân, i. e., the message of monotheism (*tawḥîd*) and the unity and continuity of God's message through all the Prophets. It has also been shown that the Bell-Watt theory of revision of the Qur'ân, based on the supposed sudden changes in subjects and rhymes and built upon a gross twisting of the facts and misinterpretation of the texts is totally wrong and untenable. Similarly it has been demonstrated that the so-called "foreign vocabulary" of the Qur'ân is nothing but words of non-Arab origin naturalized in the Arabic language before the emergence of the Prophet; and that many of these words are common to Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, Hebrew and Ethiopic, they being cognate languages branching off from the original Arabic-Aramaic, the language of the great 'Âd people, the progeny of Aram, a descendant of Sâm, son of Nûḥ, who once inhabited the whole region from Abyssinia through the Arabian Peninsula including Iraq and Syria.

There have been other attempts to find faults with the text of the Qur'ân, such as the supposed inconsistencies and grammatical faults. These suppositions are due entirely to a lack of understanding of the theme and text of the Qur'ân. Of late a theory of copyists' errors has been advanced by J. A. Bellamy. His arguments and assumptions have been examined and the absurdity of the theory has been demonstrated. It has also been shown how in their translations of the Qur'ân the orientalists attempt to tamper with the meaning and purport of the Qur'ânic texts.[1]

In their treatment of the history and text of the Qur'ân the orientalists, particularly the "revisionists", stress the need for "textual study" and they often ask the Muslims to be benefited by what is called the "hindsight of the European experience." Underlying this plea is the misconception that Islam and the Qur'ân lack liberalism, individualism and rationalism. Such a notion is totally wrong. Rather, every serious student of the European Renaissance and Reformation knows that both the movements had their origin to a large extent in the

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[1] See *supra*, chaps. XI and XII.

European contact with Islam and the Islamic civilization, and both the movements derived their inspiration from the intellectual and rational influences exerted by the Islamic East. Moreover, the Reformation took place essentially because of the pretensions and corruption of the Church and the Papacy. The eclipse of the individuality of man and the stagnation of human intellect and reason which characterized life in medieval Europe and which the Renaissance and the Reformation sought to remove and reform cannot be said to obtain in the Islamic world and the East in general.

In fact the orientalists' attempt to interpret the Qur'ân and their plea of the "hindsight of the European experience" in this context is to bring about a major social change in the Islamic world to the liking of the West. What is overlooked is that, if it is merely a question of material progress and technological development, even the non-Muslim and non-Christian peoples and countries of Asia and Africa are catching up in both the fields; while Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other peoples of these continents are not impressed by such aspects of the affluent society of the West as the gradual break-up of families due to the acceptance of pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships as a norm, the growth of single-parent families (more appropriately bastard children), recognition of lesbianism and homosexuality as individual rights, eschewing or condoning of adultery and fornication as matters of personal or private life, degradation of womanhood to a commodity for sex-appealing display and advertisements, and the like. Such developments are in fact an outcome of over-emphasis on individualism which is, on the one hand, an extreme reaction to the suppression of individualism under the Medieval European Church and Papacy and, on the other, a by-product of the notion that religion is merely a matter of private and personal life. Before attempting to bring about such social changes in the other parts of the world the Western society would do well to rethink if all the legacies of the Renaissance and the Reformation have been beneficial to itself or if these would be palatable to the rest of the world.

The main problem with the orientalists is that they do not seem to recognize the unity and continuity of God's message through all the Prophets. Even if they had cared to take into account the modern European researches[1] showing how the original teachings of Moses and Jesus have been tampered with and

[1] See for instance Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, Widenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1986; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and the Palestinian Judaism*, second impression, S.C.M. Press, London, 1981 and Michael Arnhem, *Is Christianity True?*, Duckworth, London, 1984.

corrupted[1] they would have paused to see the gigantic system of error and deception which has been devised and imposed by the Imperial Roman authority through the instrumentality of their agent Paul and would have realized the truth of the Qur'ânic statement to the same effect and its claim to have revived, completed and confirmed the message delivered through all the Prophets. This realization would also have rendered unnecessary and infructuous the witch-hunting about Muḥammad's (p.b.h) and the Qur'ân's alleged indebtedness to Judaism and Christianity and all the laboured surmises, twisting of the facts and misinterpretation of the texts which, as demonstrated in the previous few chapters, are the orientalists' main or sole stock-in-trade in their attempts to assail the Qur'ân.

[1] See for instance Robert Eiseman, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran,* Leiden, 1983; and Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, Corgi Books, 1993; Holger Kersten and Elmer Gruber, *The Jesus Conspiracy: The Turin Shroud & the Truth about the Resurrection,* Dorset, 1992; and B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford, 1993.

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